NATION

J&K statehood: CM to start door-todoor campaign

≫ Page: 4 ≪

BUSINESS

Big bang GST reform soon, only 5%, 18% slabs to stay

≫ Page: 7 ≪

SPORTS

India A women clinch ODI series with thrilling win

≫ Page: 8 ≪

www.twitter.com/EnglishSalar
www.facebook.com/EnglishSalar
www.instagram.com/dailysalarenglish
youtube.com/@dailysalardigital

SALAR

DIGITAL ENGLISH DAILY, BENGALURU

روزنامہ ساہ بنگلور

Website: salarnews.in | www.magzter.com | 16 AUGUST 2025 | SATURDAY | BENGALURU | 21 SAFAR, 1447 AH | Vol 4 | Issue No 223 | Pages: 8

Karnataka to soon get its own education policy: CM

BENGALURU, 15 AUG

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah said the State government is taking steps to frame a comprehensive "Karnataka-specific" education policy which will lead to holistic development of the youth.

A Commission constituted for this purpose has recommended a two-language policy in school education and that Kannada or the mother tongue be the medium of instruction up to Class 5.

In his address during the 79th Independence Day celebrations in Bengaluru, the Chief Minister also said the government was upgrading first-grade colleges and polytechnics in the State and establishing 13 new technical education institutions.

"Recently, the State Education Policy Commission, chaired by Prof Sukhadeo Thorat, submitted its report," Siddaramaiah said.

The Commission had submitted its report to Siddaramaiah on 8 August. It was constituted in October 2023 following the Congress' poll promise to replace the National Education Policy (NEP) of the BJP-led Centre.

A Commission has recommended a two-language policy in school education and that Kannada or the mother tongue be the medium of instruction up to Class 5, Siddaramaiah said

This year, the government is setting up 500 Karnataka Public Schools (KPS) at a cost of Rs 2,500 crore, Siddaramaiah said.

"We have increased honoraria for guest teachers and midday meal staff, prioritised teacher recruitment, upgrading first-grade colleges and polytechnics at a cost of Rs 2,500 crore, and are establishing 13 new technical education institutions," he said.

Siddaramaiah said that under the motto "My Career, My Choice", vocational guidance programmes are being implemented in 150 government schools for students from Class 8 to 12, benefiting 35,000 students so far.

"This will be expanded to train 2.3 lakh students. We are also strengthening and expanding Government Tool Room and Training Centres (GTTCs) and Multi Skill Development Centre (MSDCs)," he said.

Siddaramaiah said for the social and economic empowerment of women, 'Akka Cafes' run by self-help women groups are being set up across the State.

"In Haveri district, an Akka Cafe is being run by members of the transgender community," he added. *—PTI*

Amid tariffs, PM pushes for self-reliance in longest speech

Says Indus water is India's | Scheme to give freshers Rs 15K | New 'Sudarshan Chakra' defence system | To protect farmers

NEW DELHI, 15 AUG

With the massive US tariffs looming, Prime Minister Narendra Modi delivered the longest Independence Day speech by any PM in Indian history, as he called for self-reliance, promised to protect farmers, made veiled threats at Pakistan, and announced aid for youth entering the private sector workforce.

In his 103-minute speech from the ramparts of Delhi's Red fort, Modi announced a 10-year project to develop an indigenous defence shield to protect India's vital military and civilian installations.

Modi's 12th consecutive Independence Day speech was focused on the theme of "aatmanirbharta" (self-reliance).

"This mission Sudarshan Chakra, a powerful weapon system, will not only neutralise the enemy's attack but will also hit back at the enemy many times more," he said.

Experts said the system could be on the lines of Israel's Iron Dome all-weather air-defence system.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi atop the Red Fort on the 79th Independence Day *PHOTO: PTI*

- **The Centre proposed to removes 12% and 28% slabs on GST, which are applicable to standard goods and luxury or sin goods respectively**
- **Modi said India will establish 10 new nuclear reactors. India will increase its nuclear energy capacity tenfold by 2047, he said**
- **India is going to launch the National Deep Water Exploration Mission to explore the reserves of oil and gas beneath the sea, Modi said**

ECONOMIC FREEDOM

Modi gave a renewed call for self-reliance, as he likened his push for a "Samriddh Bharat" (Prosperous India) to the struggle of the freedom fighters.

"We should not waste our energy on shortening the line of any country. We have to make our line longer with full energy. The world will acknowledge our mettle if we can do it," Modi said. "If we choose this path, then no selfish interest will ever be able to entrap us."

He made a sweeping call for "swadeshi" (Made in India) and innovation in a gamut of sectors, including semiconductors, social media, fertiliser and pharma.

OPERATION SINDOOR

Indian farmers have the sole right to the country's share of Indus river waters, Modi remarked, and termed the Indus Water Treaty "unjust and one-sided".

Modi accused the treaty of allowing rivers that rise in India to "irrigate the fields of our enemies, while the soil of my country and the farmers of my country remain thirsty".

"The waters that belong to India will be used by India, for India's farmers alone and we would no longer tolerate an arrangement that deprived its farmers," he said.

Modi added that India will no longer separate terrorists from those providing them a safe haven, as he underlined the need for developing a jet engine within the country for India's fighter aircraft programme.

PROTECT FARMERS

The Prime Minister said that he is standing like a wall to protect farmers.

"Modi is standing like a wall against any harmful policy related to the farmers, fishermen and cattle rearers of India. India will never accept any compromise regarding its farmers, its livestock rearers, its fishermen," he said.

The remarks are important as the US is seeking duty concessions from India in agriculture and dairy sectors in the proposed bilateral trade agreement (BTA).

FRESHERS BOOST

Modi announced Rs 15,000 aid for youth entering the private sector job market under the new Pradhan Mantri Viksit Bharat Rozgar Yojana.

"Companies that create more employment opportunities will also be given incentives. The Pradhan Mantri Viksit Bharat Rojgar Yojana will create nearly 3.5 crore new employment opportunities for the youth," Modi said.

The benefits will apply to jobs created between 1 August, 2025, and 31 July, 2027. *—PTI*

>>>More on Pages 2, 3, 7

Modi lauds RSS, calls it 'world's biggest NGO'

NEW DELHI/ BHUBANESWAR, 15 AUG

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday hailed 100 years of Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) as a "very proud and glorious" journey of the "world's biggest NGO" and lauded all its volunteers for their dedicated service to the nation. It is built by the efforts of crores of people, including saints, seers, scientists, teachers, farmers, soldiers, labourers, individuals, and organisations, he said.

"Today I want to mention one thing with great pride that 100 years ago an organisation was born -- the RSS. Its 100 years of national service has been a very proud and glorious page," said Modi.

Meanwhile, RSS Chief Mohan Bhagwat said Indians need to work hard and make sacrifices to keep Independence "alive".

"Our ancestors ensured India's Independence by making supreme sacrifices. We too need to be as hardworking as they were," he said. *—PTI*

Security personnel at the site after a portion of the structure at Humayun's Tomb collapses, in New Delhi on Friday *PHOTO: PTI*

5 dead after dargah wall near Humayun's Tomb collapses

NEW DELHI, 15 AUG

Five people were killed and four others injured on Friday evening after a wall of a dargah near the Humayun's Tomb in Delhi's Nizamuddin area collapsed, police said. A total of nine injured people were sent to AIIMS Trauma Centre and one was rushed to LNJP Hospital, they said.

"So far, we have learned that five people who were under treatment at AIIMS trauma Centre died and others are still under treatment. We have cordoned off the area," Joint Commissioner of Police Sanjay Kumar Jain told reporters.

He said that the people were visiting the dargah for Friday prayers and were sitting inside the room due to rain when the incident took place.

The rescue operation is completed, the police said, adding a total of 10 to 12 victims were rescued from the debris after a call regarding the incident was received at 3.55 PM.

Authorities clarified that the incident did not involve the main dome of the 16th-century monument but a smaller room within its premises.

Humayun's Tomb, a UNESCO World Heritage Site. However, no damage was reported to the tomb itself. *—PTI*

Rescue operation underway at Chisoti village, in Kishtwar district, Jammu and Kashmir, Friday *PHOTO: PTI*

J&K CLOUDBURST TOLL IS NOW 60

KISHTWAR/JAMMU, 15 AUG

At least 60 people have been confirmed dead after a powerful cloudburst struck Chisoti village in Jammu and Kashmir's Kishtwar district on Thursday, leaving dozens missing and over 160 injured.

The disaster, which occurred at around 12.25pm, devastated the last motorable point on the Machail Mata pilgrimage route, flattening homes, markets, a community kitchen, and a security post.

Rescuers including Army, police, NDRF, SDRF, and local volunteers have recovered 46 bodies so far, with 30 identified and handed over to families. Search operations, hampered by rain and blocked roads, intensified on Friday, though helicopters remain grounded.

Chief Minister Omar Abdullah acknowledged the possibility of administrative lapses despite prior heavy rain warnings, vowing accountability. Prime Minister Narendra Modi has assured full central assistance.

More than a dozen earthmovers and 300 Army personnel are clearing debris. Hundreds remain without electricity or communications. *—PTI*

Boy killed in cylinder blast in City

BENGALURU, 15 AUG

A 10-year-old boy died in a suspected cylinder blast here on Friday, police said. At least nine persons were injured in the incident.

Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah announced after visiting the blast spot and hospitals that Rs 5 lakh compensation will be given to the family of the deceased.

"And the medical expenses of those injured will be borne by the government," he added. The victim was identified as Mubarak.

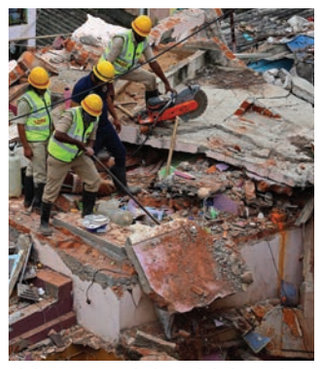
The incident happened at Chinnayanpalya of Wilson Garden, Central Bengaluru, a tightly packed predominantly residential neighbourhood where houses abut each other.

After visiting the site, Siddaramaiah said that prima facie, a cylinder blast was the cause for the incident. "There is no smell, but according to police and Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike reports, a cylinder blast might have taken place," he said.

The house where the blast occurred belongs to one Kasturamma, who is also admitted in hospital with burn injuries, added the CM. 13 houses have been damaged.

"I have told the BBMP Commissioner to get the houses repaired. If the house has collapsed completely, we will construct it," he added. *—PTI*

>>>More on Page 2



civic personnel clear debris at the blast site *PHOTO: SALAR*

TRUMP'S NEW TAKE

'Tariffs on India forced Moscow to talk'

NEW YORK/ WASHINGTON/MOSCOW, 15 AUG

US President Donald Trump has claimed that the tariffs imposed on India for purchasing oil from Russia influenced Moscow's decision to seek a meeting with Washington, as the country was losing its "second largest customer".

The comments come ahead of Trump's high-profile meeting with Russian President Vladimir Putin, scheduled for Friday in Anchorage, Alaska.

Trump told Fox News, "I think everything has an impact," and claimed that when he told India that "we're going to charge you, because you're dealing with Russia and oil purchases", it "essentially took them out of buying oil from Russia".

"And then they (Russia) called, and they wanted to meet. We're going to see what the meeting means. But certainly, when you lose your second largest customer, and you're probably going to lose your first largest customer (China, I think that probably has a role," he said.

India on Thursday said it has not halted oil purchases from Russia in response to the US President's tariff threat and continues to buy based on economic considerations. Trump last week announced an additional 25 per cent tariff on US imports from India -- raising the overall duty to 50 per cent -- as a penalty for the country's continued imports of Russian oil. The tariffs will come into effect from 27 August.

Meanwhile, Putin praised India's "well-deserved authority" in international affairs.

Putin also underlined commitment to strengthening the "special privileged strategic partnership" between the two nations in his Independence Day messages to India. *—PTI*

>>>More on Page 6

Raj, Uddhav to contest civic polls together: Raut

NASHIK, 15 AUG

Shiv Sena (UBT) MP Sanjay Raut announced on Friday that his party is set to ally with the Maharashtra Navnirman Sena (MNS), led by Raj Thackeray, for the upcoming civic elections in Mumbai, Thane, Nashik, and Kalyan-Dombivali.

Raut expressed confidence in their collaboration, stating, "The Thackeray brothers... will contest the municipal corporation elections together and win. The strength of Raj and Uddhav Thackeray is the strength of the unity of the Marathi-speakers. No power can break the iron fist of 'Marathi manus' now."

Raut confirmed discussions are underway for the alliance.

However, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) was quick to dismiss Raut's claims. State BJP legislator Pravin Darekar questioned the validity of their talks, labelling it as Raut's "guesswork." He remarked, "We have not seen so much helplessness in Uddhav Thackeray, who did not remember his own cousin... for the last 20 years." *—PTI*

State DGP transfers four fraud cases to CID

MANGALURU, 15 AUG

State Director General and Inspector General of Police has transferred four criminal cases against alleged multi-crore fraudster Roshan Saldanha, to the Criminal Investigation Department for an extensive probe. This directive was issued on 13 August. The cases are linked to a 'loan-and-land fraud' scheme, with estimated amounts ranging from Rs 10 crore to over Rs 200 crore. Saldanha, 43, a resident of Bollagudda, Bajal, was arrested in July after a police raid on his mansion, which reportedly contained secret chambers and intricate deception setups to exploit businessmen. Authorities have frozen Rs 3.7 crore and uncovered victim networks extending to Maharashtra and Assam. ED is conducting simultaneous raids under Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA). *—PTI*

PHOTO: SALAR

Shaheen Group threatens ₹10 cr defamation suit

HYDERABAD, 15 AUG

Dr Mohammad Abdul Qadeer, Chairman of the Shaheen Group of Educational Institutions, has strongly condemned the spread of fabricated allegations and objectionable videos on social media aimed at blackmailing the administration and misleading public. He warned that strict legal action will be taken against those targeting minority educational institutions that have dedicated to equipping the community with education and culture. He named one such individual, Alam Pasha, a cleric from City, who circulated misleading videos accusing Shaheen of scholarship misuse and other baseless charges. The institute has issued a legal notice to Pasha demanding an apology and removal of the misleading content from within three days, failing which he would be liable to pay Rs 10 crore. *—Salar News*

K'taka faces discrimination from Centre: CM on I Day

Says investors want to bring Rs 10 lakh cr in investments

BENGALURU, 15 AUG

Delivering his address for at the 79th Independence Day celebrations in City, Chief Minister Siddaramaiah said that the State is facing discrimination in the distribution of resources from the Centre.

Every responsible citizen must raise their voice in this regard, he said.

Siddaramaiah added that the State is now stepping forward to become the world's 'Capital of Innovation'.

He said that investors want to bring in over Rs 10 lakh crore in investments. Out of this, 48 per cent has already been processed under Single Window IT Platform.

Noting that the government has rolled out multiple programmes for the welfare of labourers, particularly in the unorganised sector, the CM said, "We will be soon implementing the Karnataka Labour Policy to ensure job security…. We are not only safeguarding the interests of all workers engaged in this sector, but enacting 'Platform-Based Gig Workers Bill' for the welfare of over five lakh gig workers".

Under this Bill, the government is introducing an insurance scheme providing coverage of up to Rs 4 lakh for these workers, he added.

Meanwhile, Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar in his address at the KPCC office, asked party workers to a take a five-point oath to save the sanctity of democracy.

"We need to take a five-point oath today: Save democracy, Constitution and sanctity of elections and to fight injustice of tax devolution and to eliminate fascism. Freedom is not something that has a price tag," he said.

"The first independence struggle in the country took place in Shivamogga district. Kittur Chennamma was the first one to defeat the British.

CM Siddaramaiah and DyCM DK Shivakumar during the 79th Independence Day celebrations at Manekshaw Parade Grounds in Bengaluru on Friday
PHOTO: MOHAMMAD ASAD

- Shivakumar took a 5-point oath: To save democracy, the Constitution, elections, and to fight the injustice of tax devolution and uphold federalism to eliminate fascism

Kannadigas have contributed a lot for the Independence movement," he reminisced.

"It is not enough if we hoist the tricolour and sing national anthem, we need to spread the mes-sage of our sacrifices to the future generations. Else, traitors will keep preaching us patriotism. It is the Congressmen who fought for independence but they are trying to defame these leaders," he said.

"The Opposition asks about the contribution of the Congress party for the independence struggle… More than 6.5 lakh Congressmen sacrificed their life during the Independence struggle," he said.

Speaking to press later, he said, "There is a new wave in the country. It is good to see all non-BJP parties joining hands." *—Salar News with Agencies*

79TH INDEPENDENCE DAY CELEBRATIONS

The City witnessed a grand 79th Independence Day, with BSF personnel putting up a stunning parade at the Manekshaw Parade Grounds while people crowded to see Lalbagh's 218th Flower Show, on Friday
PHOTOS: MOHAMMAD ASAD

Considering action against fake news on Dh'sthala: DKS

BENGALURU, 15 AUG

DK Shivakumar ***PHOTO: PTI***

The government is contemplating whether to take action against those who carried out a misinformation campaign against Dharmasthala, Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar said.

"It is not about for or against Dharmasthala, the process must be as per the law," he said at the KPCC office on Friday. "I have known Dharmasthala closely and I have faith in the place. Since I know well, it's a big conspiracy. Government will definitely take action against those who misused the name and created lot of confusion. I can't tell personally, but I'm confident whatever has shown in media is far from the truth."

Shivakumar added, "I firmly believe that the conspiracy will be exposed in the days to come. The Home Minister will present the facts about this case in the House."

"The Chief Minister (Siddaramaiah) has also said that no one should make false allegations or run a campaign against any religious person or institution," he added. "This was stated in the Congress legislature party meeting."

Shivakumar added that if the allegations are proven false, strict action would be taken following the law.

Home Minister G Parameshwara is expected to respond to the discussion on Monday.

The Special Investigation Team (SIT), set up by the State government, is probing claims made by a former sanitation worker who said that he was forced to bury hundreds of bodies over two decades—including those of women and minors—some of which bore signs of sexual assault. *—Salar News with Agencies*

BROTHERS APPROACH SIT WITH 2012 MISSING PERSON CASE FROM DH'STHALA

MANGALURU, 15 AUG

Brothers, Nitin and Nitesh, filed a complaint with the SIT probing charges of murders and burials in Dharmasthala, regarding their younger sister, Hemalatha, who went missing in 2012 after visiting the town and never returned.

Speaking to reporters after lodging their complaint, Nitin said it has been 13 years with no information about his sister.

When they came to know that SIT is collecting information on missing persons, they decided to make a complaint, he said.

Hemalatha, then 17 and a resident of Kavala Muduru village in Bantwal taluk, had gone to Dharmasthala accompanied by a woman neighbour but never returned. When questioned, the woman accompanying her denied having gone with her, Nitin said.

Though the brothers had previously filed a complaint at the Poonjalakatte police station and visited multiple stations over the years, the case remained unresolved.

Nitin added that their sister, who had studied up to the 8th standard and helped at home thereafter, had no mobile phone.

He said they had searched as thoroughly as possible but found no clues. *—PTI*

2L ACCIDENTS, 60,115 DEATHS IN 6 YEARS

BENGALURU, 15 AUG

The Transport Department data revealed that there were 2,12,192 accidents and 60,115 deaths over the past six years in the State.

Transport Minister Ramalinga Reddy, replying to a question from Legislative Council member KN Naveen, said fatalities are mainly due to overspeeding, drunk driving, and loss of control.

Annual figures show no consistent decline: 2020 – 34,178 accidents, 9,760 deaths; 2021 – 34,647, 10,038; 2022 – 39,769, 11,702; 2023 – 43,440, 12,321; 2024 – 39,228, 10,319; 2025 – 21,937, 5,975.

High-risk corridors include the Mysuru–Bengaluru Highway, Tumakuru National Highway, and Bengaluru–Mangaluru National Highway. Last year, Mysuru, Tumakuru, and Bengaluru recorded the highest accident counts. Bengaluru City saw 2,297 accidents and 390 deaths, while Tumakuru rec-orded 1,279 accidents and 367 deaths.

To curb accidents, the government has installed highway speed regulators, imposed higher fines for overspeeding, and put up more road signage.

However, Reddy admitted that despite these measures, accident numbers remain high, underscoring the urgent need for stricter enforcement and public awareness. *—Salar News*

₹1.41 cr, 6.7kg gold seized from Cong MLA's home

NEW DELHI, 15 AUG

- The investigation also targeted companies including Ashapura Minechem and Shree Lal Mahal under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA)

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) has seized Rs 1.41 crore in cash from the residence of State Congress MLA Satish Krishna Sail, alongside 6.75kg of gold jewellery and bullion from his family's bank lockers, as part of a money laundering investigation tied to the alleged illegal export of iron ore linked to the legislator.

Sail, representing the Karwar constituency in Uttara Kannada district, was unavailable for immediate comment. The ED conducted searches between 13-14 August across Karwar, Goa, Mumbai, and Delhi.

The investigation also targeted companies including Ashapura Minechem and Shree Lal Mahal under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA). Both Sail and these entities were convicted by a special court in Bengaluru for the "illegal" export of iron ore fines via Shree Mallikarjun Ship-ping Pvt Ltd, reportedly associated with Sail.

The ED claims that between April and June 2010, nearly 1.25 lakh metric tonnes of iron ore was exported illegally, amounting to Rs 86.78 crore. A total of Rs 14.13 crore in bank deposits linked to the accused has been frozen, and "incriminating" evidence has been recovered. *—PTI*

Congress slams Centre on semiconductor project locations

BENGALURU, 15 AUG

The State Congress leaders have sharply criticised the Union Cabinet's recent approval of semiconductor manufacturing facilities in Odisha, Punjab, and Andhra Pradesh, claiming the Centre favours BJP-ruled states over national interests. Chief Minister's legal advisor AS Ponnanna stated the "BJP government prioritises political gains over national interest," citing the yellow metro line project as evidence of their politicking.

Deputy CM DK Shivakumar also weighed in, criticising PM Modi for praising Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) in his Independence Day speech, stating, "RSS doesn't have any history. Congress has a longer history in this country."

Meanwhile, Union Ministers welcomed the Cabinet's decision as a positive development. *—ANI*

10-year-old boy killed in City blast was labourer's son

BENGALURU, 15 AUG

City Police Commissioner, Seemanth Kumar Singh said the house in which the suspected cylinder blast occurred, was being rented by a three-member family. One person died and nine others were injured in the blast

"The man works as a labourer and had left for work early in the morning as usual. The mother and the child at home were injured. But the boy who died was in a neighbouring house," said Kumar.

He said the police control room received the call around 8.30am.

"We immediately informed the Bomb Disposal Squad, Anti-Terrorism Squad, State Disaster Response Force, Fire Brigade as well as the local police," Singh added.

"We are clearing the houses that are damaged, investigation is on." *—PTI*

Fire personnel inspect the Wilson Garden houses damaged by the suspected LPG blast, on Friday ***PHOTO: MOHAMMAD ASAD***

'WHY DO YOU HAVE DOUBTS?'

Rajanna confident about returning as minister

KN Rajanna ***PHOTO: PTI***

TUMAKURU, 15 AUG

- The sacked corporate minister said the CM also wasn't aware why the High Command had asked for his removal and even batted for him. Rajanna also dismissed ideas of joining the BJP.

KN Rajanna, who was recently sacked from the Siddaramaiah-led cabinet in State, on Friday expressed confidence about coming back as minister within the current government's tenure.

The Madhugiri MLA said he will be going to New Delhi after the Assembly session to meet the High Command.

Rajanna, who was the cooperative minister, was removed from the Cabinet on Monday, following directions from the Congress High Command, reportedly because of his comments against the grain of party leader Rahul Gandhi's "vote chori" claims.

"I will take the minister post when the time comes in this government's tenure. Why do you have any doubts?" Rajanna said. "I have achieved everything I desired in life so far. I will achieve this (minister post) too in this term itself."

Responding to a question, Rajanna said he is confident that the high command will get convinced.

Rajanna said he is still not aware of the exact reason for his sacking.

"Without unseen hands, how will the decision come all of a sudden? The Chief Minister himself wasn't aware that the High Command was thinking on these lines," he said. "While on the way from his home to Vidhana Soudha, the CM was seen speaking to someone over the phone alone for some time. Some channels showed the videos."

"Siddaramaiah had tried to convince the high command, but when they said a decision had been made, the CM told me the situation," he added.

He also dismissed rumours about joining the BJP. "Just because they have invited me, can I go? Why should I go? Congress has given everything to me." *—PTI*

12 Bangladeshi nationals detained in Kolar

KOLAR, 15 AUG

PHOTO: FREEPIK

A total of twelve Bangladeshi nationals, including four children, were detained by Srinivaspur Police last evening and subsequently relocated to detention centres in Tumkuru and Nelamangala.

Two Bangladeshi men acting suspiciously in Srinivaspur were apprehended and brought to the police station. During interrogation, they claimed to be rag pickers and revealed that several of their acquaintances were living in various camps near Nandagudi, all engaged in the same occupation. Following this, a police team visited Nandagudi and detained another ten individuals, including four children.

This situation was reported to B Nikhil, Superintendent of Police for Kolar district, and the Assistant Commissioner for the Kolar Sub-division, who directed the transfer of the detainees to the centres. Inspector Mehaboob Pasha noted that of the eight adults apprehended, two had been illegally residing in India for several years. The women and children were reported to have arrived more recently. Although some detainees possessed Aadhaar card, the inspector said that these were fraudulent. *—SALAR NEWS*

Khadse's kin clicks woman's photos; booked

PUNE, 15 AUG

Pranjal Khewalkar, son-in-law of former Maharashtra minister and NCP (SP) leader Eknath Khadse, has been booked in Pune for allegedly photographing and filming a woman without her consent, police said. Khewalkar, husband of Rohini Khadse, is already in jail following his arrest on 27 July during a police raid on a Kharadi flat, where officers claimed a "drug party" was underway. A woman has alleged he took her pictures and videos without permission. He faces charges under various sections of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, with the case filed at the cyber police station. State Women's Commission chief Rupali Chakankar warned more such cases may follow, calling it Maharashtra's biggest "sex racket." *—PTI*

1,500 convicts at Tihar Jail get special remission

NEW DELHI, 15 AUG

On India's 79th Independence Day, nearly 1,500 convicts at Tihar Jail were granted special remission of 15–25 days for good conduct, director general (Prisons) Satish Golchha announced. Housing over 18,000 inmates, Tihar is Asia's largest prison complex. To ease overcrowding, the Delhi government has approved Rs 145.58 crore for a new facility in Narela. The reforms included educational and vocational training, the 'Unnati' behavioural programme for 600 inmates, improved healthcare with specialist doctors and a new intelligence cell. The prison department also operates the Lampur Detention Centre, housing 273 foreign nationals. Recruitment for nearly 1,800 new posts is underway. He emphasised rehabilitation and reintegration of the inmates. *—PTI*

BJP leader, Nagaland Guv La Ganesan no more

CHENNAI/ KOHIMA, 15 AUG

Nagaland Governor La Ganesan, former president of Tamil Nadu BJP, died on Friday while undergoing treatment at a private hospital in Chennai. Ganesan had collapsed at his home in Chennai and sustained a head injury. Ganesan was appointed the 21st governor of Nagaland on February 12, 2023 and he assumed office on February 20 that year. An RSS pracharak turned BJP karyakarta, he quit his government job to join the RSS as a full time worker. He served BJP in several roles, including the party's Tamil Nadu unit president. anesan, 80, served as Governor of Manipur, West Bengal and Nagaland between 2021 and 2025. Noted for his keen interest in Tamil literature, he founded Pottramarai, an association to nurture Tamil scholars. He also wrote songs on patriotism. Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Tamil Nadu Chief Minister MK Stalin and a host of other leaders condoled his death. *—PTI*

New mission to find oil under seabed

PM says National Deep Water Exploration Mission will boost domestic production

Prime Minister Narendra Modi after hoisting the National Flag during the 79th Independence Day celebration at the Red Fort, in New Delhi *PHOTO: PTI*

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi during the 79th Independence Day celebration amid rains in New Delhi *PHOTO: PTI*

People carry a giant Indian national flag on the occasion of the 79th Independence Day, in Hyderabad in Telangana on Friday

NEW DELHI, 15 AUG

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday announced a National Deep Water Exploration Mission aimed at discovering oil and gas reserves beneath the seabed, as part of efforts to boost domestic production and reduce the country's multi-billion-dollar import bill.

India is dependent on imports to meet 88 per cent of its needs of crude oil, which is converted into fuels like petrol and diesel, and half of its requirement of natural gas, which is used to generate electricity, produce fertilisers and converted to CNG to power automobiles.

The country's dependence is due to a lack of easy-to-find reserves. Large oil and gas discoveries like KG-D6 of Reliance Industries and KG-DWN-98/2 of ONGC happened in the pre-2014 period in deep-sea blocks.

"If we weren't dependent on energy imports, that money could have been used for eradicating poverty, farmers' welfare and improving conditions in our villages...," Modi said.

The National Deep Water Exploration Mission is a significant step toward achieving energy independence, he said.

The Centre revamped the New Exploration Licensing Policy (NELP), ushering in an open acreage licensing policy and opening up record area for exploration of oil and gas.

Oil Minister Hardeep Singh Puri said several key reforms, including legislation, were initiated to enhance exploration and production activities in India. 52 discoveries were made in the last five years, and 172 since 2014, including 66 offshore. 0.38 million square kilometres has been awarded for exploration.

Nearly 1 million sq km of erstwhile 'No-Go' areas, including the Andaman-Nicobar basin, were opened up for exploration.

The Andhra coast and the Andaman Sea, may hold some prospects.

Puri said that 25 blocks have been offered for bidding under the current OALP-X bid round, including promising ones in Andaman basin. *—PTI*

'SUPER SIX POLL PROMISES SUPERHIT'

AMARAVATI, 15 AUG

Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu has marked Independence Day by condemning the previous YSR Congress Party (YSRCP) government for allegedly plunging the state into debt. Addressing a gathering after unfurling the national flag, Naidu declared the "Super Six" poll promises made by the TDP-led NDA a success, asserting that the people of Andhra Pradesh initiated a "silent revolution" in the 2024 elections.

"The coalition government is a government for the poor. We are spending thousands of crores to elevate living standards through welfare schemes," he stated. He highlighted the government's focus on good governance and welfare, proclaiming: "This is an all-time record."

Naidu introduced 'Stree Shakti,' a scheme for women to enjoy free bus travel in certain services. Other promises include monthly aid of Rs 1,500 for women, 20 lakh jobs, and financial support for students and farmers.

He committed to providing housing for all by 2029 and promised completion of the Polavaram Project by December 2027. Referring to the previous government's failures, he noted, *—PTI*

Modi promises to tackle infiltration during I-Day speech

NEW DELHI, 15 AUG

Prime Minister Narendra Modi said that there was a pre-mediated con¬spiracy to change the coun¬try's demography as he flagged the issue of ille¬gal "infiltration".

"Today I want to alert the country about a concern, a challenge. Under a well-thought out conspiracy, the demography of the country is being changed. Seeds of a new crisis are being sown. These 'ghuspaithiya' (intruders) are snatching the livelihood of the youth of my country, these ghuspaithiya are targeting the sisters and daughters of my country, this will not be toler¬ated. These ghuspaithiya are misleading the innocent trib¬als and grabbing their land. This country will not tolerate this," Modi said during his Independence Day speech from the Red Fort.

He announced a high-pow¬ered demography mission to tackle the problem.

Modi said India is working towards becoming self-reliant in the space sector *PHOTO: PTI*

ELEVATING FARMERS

Modi said 100 underperforming agricultural districts will be brought on par with other farming regions through the implementation of the PM Dhan-Dhanya Krishi Yojana.

The Prime Minister said the government has identified 100 districts lagging in farming and launched a campaign to empower farmers under the PM Dhan-Dhanya Krishi Yojana.

INDIA TO LAUNCH SPACE STATION

India is working towards becoming self-reliant in the space sector and preparing for the launch of Gaganyaan, its indigenous human space flight mission, Modi said.

"We are confident of achieving the goal of a USD 44 billion space economy by 2033 and cement¬ing India's position among the world's leading spacefaring nations," he said.

The first module of India's own space station is planned for launch in 2028 and a full-fledged Bharatiya Antariksh Station by 2035.

'NEVER FORGET EMERGENCY'

Modi said no generation in should forget how democracy was murdered in India—*PTI*

PM praised RSS to appease Sangh: Cong

NEW DELHI, 15 AUG

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's praise for the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) during his Independence Day speech has drawn sharp criticism from opposition parties, particularly the Congress and the Communist Party of India (Marxist).

Congress leader Jairam Ramesh labelled the PM's remarks as "most troubling," asserting they represent a "breach" of the spirit of a constitutional, secular republic. He stated, "It is nothing but a desperate attempt to appease the organisation in the run-up to his 75th birthday next month." Ramesh further described the speech as "stale, hypocritical, insipid," alleging a lack of measurable outcomes from Modi's repeated promises, such as 'Viksit Bharat' and 'Atmanirbhar Bharat'.

Echoing similar concerns, CPI(M) General Secretary MA Baby remarked that Modi's commendation of the RSS was "profoundly unacceptable and shameful." He accused the organisation of having a "dubious historical record," citing its ban following the assassination of Mahatma Gandhi and its alleged role in inciting communal riots.

In response to Modi's assertion, Ramesh countered that the Prime Minister has presided over the erosion of democratic institutions and federalism, calling for honest acknowledgement of the country's ongoing economic challenges, rather than "self-congratulation and selective storytelling." *—PTI*

"Narendra Modi uses his Independence Day speech to target a new 'enemy'. After Andolanjeevis etc now 'infiltrators' are the new target. New 'missions' announced while targeting past governments."

- Sagarika Ghose, TMC Leader

"Communal forces are strengthening their attempts to destroy the idea of India by trying to create religious and racial divisions. We all need to be united, irrespective to defeat such attempts."

- Pinarayi Vijayan, Kerala Chief Minister

"Now the ruling party is ready to go to any extent of immorality to remain in power. Large-scale irregularities are coming to light in elections."

- Mallikarjun Kharge, Congress President

"On this occasion, I once again demand the central government to take a quick decision on the pending BC quota bills. The state Assembly passed two bills to provide 42 per cent quota to Backward Classes in local bodies, education and jobs."

- A Revanth Reddy, Telangana Chief Minister

"Now, we are planning to launch Regional Vibrant Summits to give a push to the industrial development in towns and villages and 'Agenda 2035', a roadmap for transforming the state."

– Bhupendra Patel, Gujarat Chief Minister

"Bihar is moving ahead with a high growth rate and development. We have fixed a new target of providing jobs and employment opportunities to one crore youth in the state."

– Nitish Kumar, Bihar Chief Minister

"If we do not act now, in just a few years, Assam's demography will change in such a way that even the chief minister will be from the community of infiltrators."

-Himanta Biswa Sarma, Assam Chief Minister

Manipur still remains tense as another man found dead

IMPHAL/ HURACHANDPUR, 15 AUG

"The overall law and order situation in Manipur has improved tremendously and is stable and under control. Security forces continue extensive search operations and area domination activities in vulnerable and fringe areas."

A man from Churachandpur in Manipur, has been found dead near Bishnupur district, police reported on Friday. Sokhongam Baite, a resident of Tuibong, had been missing since Thursday evening after venturing out to collect bamboo shoots. Tensions briefly escalated in Churachandpur town following the incident. Security forces deployed in both Churachandpur and Bishnupur districts initiated a search for Baite, whose body was located near an electric transformer in the Torbung area, approximately 13km from his home. Due to the presence of high-voltage power lines, efforts to retrieve the body were delayed until Friday morning. It has now been sent to Churachandpur district hospital for a post-mortem examination.

"The exact cause of death will be determined after the post-mortem," an official stated. "Preliminary investigations suggest he may have died due to electrocution." The ethnic clashes between Kukis and Meiteis claimed over 260 lives. *—PTI*

AGAINST MEAT SALE BAN

AIMIM leader holds biryani party on I'Day

CHHATRAPATI SAMBHAJINAGAR, AUG 15

All India Majlis-e-Ittehadul Muslimeen leader Imtiaz Jaleel on Friday organised a "biryani party" at his residence here to mark his protest against the local civic body's order to keep the meat shops in the city shut on account of festivals.

He also hit out at Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis for not directing the municipal commissioner to withdraw the ban.

This year, Independence Day and Gokul Ashtami, a Hindu festival marking the birth of Lord Krishna, are being celebrated on Friday.

The Chhatrapati Sambhajinagar Municipal Corporation announced the closure of slaughterhouses, outlets and shops selling meat within city limits on Friday and 20 August, the beginning of 'Paryushan Parva.'

The former MP said "I have cooked chicken biryani along with a vegetarian dish. If the municipal commissioner comes and asks for vegetarian food, then I will offer it to him. But the government should not tell us what we should eat and what we should not."

AIMIM leader Imtiaz Jaleel questioned if the government will shut liquor shops on Bakrid *PHOTO: X*

When pointed out that the meat ban was being implemented in view of Gokul Ashtami, he asked, "Is this festival being celebrated in some districts only? Hindus across the state are celebrating it. Had the government adopted a policy in this regard, then we would have respected it." "There are few over-enthusiastic municipal commissioners who issued these orders to make the government happy... Muslims celebrate only Ramzan and Bakri Eid. Will the government shut the liquor shops on these two festivals of Muslim community?" Jaleel asked. *—PTI*

'Only legal action can retrieve states' powers'

CHENNAI, 15 AUG

While states need additional powers, their powers in matters such as education are usurped, Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M K Stalin alleged on Friday and batted for legal action to achieve this.

In his Independence Day address here, Stalin said that a state government always struggling to get its rightful funds from the Centre does not augur well for federalism.

To retrieve states' role and powers, legal action is the only solution, he said, adding the time has arrived to take preliminary steps to take forward such steps to retrieve states' powers.

The CM said people belonging to all states, religions, languages and cultures fought and won freedom and that was why the founding fathers of the nation wished India to be a country for all sections of people for all times to come. Fulfilling the wishes of the founding members is how the puublic can pay true tribute to them.

The CM conferred the Thagaisal Thamizhar Award on Indian Union Muslim League leader KM Khader Mohideen and the Dr APJ Abdul Kalam Award on ISRO Chairman V Narayanan duirng the occasion. *—PTI*

Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M.K. Stalin presents the Thagaisal Thamizhar Award to IUML leader KM Kader Mohideeni *PHOTO: PTI*

PHOTO: X

Kolkatta students fall ill during I-Day parade

KOLKATA, 15 AUG

Thirty-nine schoolchildren fell ill while participating in the state-level Independence Day parade at Red Road on Friday, officials said. They were immediately taken to the state-run SSKM Hospital for treatment. Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee, who took the guard of honour at the event, visited the hospital to check on the students. She said the hot and humid weather, coupled with rain, led to dehydration among some participants. "Now everyone is stable. They were served breakfast earlier and have since had lunch," she added.The affected students came from various schools across the state. Police and multiple state government departments also took part in the parade alongside the school children. —*PTI*

Major attack on I-Day thwarted in Tripura; 2 held

AGARTALA, 15 AUG

Police in Tripura foiled a major attack planned for Independence Day, arresting two men with explosives, officials said on Friday. Acting on a tip-off, a vehicle was intercepted at Vanghmun in North Tripura on Thursday evening. The suspects, believed to be members of the newly-formed Tripura United National Force (TUNF), were carrying 14 electric detonators and neogel explosives, SP Avinash Kumar Rai said. The arrested men were identified as Dhananjoy Reang of Katlichhera, Assam, and Sadai Nanda Reang of Kasko in Damchhera, North Tripura. "The duo intended to target police, damage vehicles, and seize arms ahead of Independence Day celebrations," Rai said, adding the operation averted a major security incident. —*PTI*

Dengue claims 1 life, 3 infected in Maharashtra

GADCHIROLI, 15 AUG

One person has died of dengue and three others from a suspected fever in Gadchiroli district, Maharashtra, over the past week. Authorities suspended one medical officer and two healthcare workers for failing to take timely preventive measures. 117 people have tested positive for dengue across 10–12 villages in Mulchera taluka, where the deaths occurred. The first death was on 6 August, followed by three more on 8, 11, and 13 August. Three of the deceased were treated in a private hospital. Following the outbreak, 15 health teams were surveying 25 villages, collecting samples, and carrying out fogging and awareness drives. Additional medical staff was deployed in Lagam PHC. —*PTI*

5 kids injured as ceiling in school falls in Rajasthan

KOTA, 15 AUG

A portion of a false ceiling at the St. Paul's Senior Secondary School's auditorium in Rajasthan's Bundi fell during Independence Day celebrations on Friday, leaving five students injured. They were rushed to a hospital where two children received stitches on their heads. The injured kids were identified as Aadira Panjwani, Aarna Jhakal, Shreshthi , Twinkle Soni and Vinay Tehlwani. 350 students, 250 parents and 49 staff members were present at the time of the incident. The technical team of the district education department surveyed the spot and an inquiry was ordered. Meanwhile, the auditorium has been sealed. State Education Minister Madan Dilawar has ordered an inquiry into the matter. —*PTI*

J&K cloudburst survivors recall 'miraculous' escape

Survivors are in disbelief as they mourn their loved ones

CHOSITI, 15 AUG

Devanshi, was among the hundreds of pilgrims who had gathered here for the last leg of the yatra to Machail Mata temple when tragedy struck on 14 August. Buried under mud and debris when a Maggi-point shop was hit by flash floods, she emerged hours later, rescued by her uncle and other villagers.

"I couldn't breathe. My uncle, bouji, and others removed wooden planks after hours, and we all came out. Mata saved us," the nine-year-old said.

Sneha was in disbelief that she survived. She and her four family members were swept away in a roaring torrent, buried under mud and crushed beneath a vehicle.

"I was trapped in mud under a vehicle, surrounded by bodies of children with broken necks and severed limbs," she said.

60 people died when a massive cloudburst led to flash floods in this remote mountain village in Jammu and Kashmir's Kishtwar district.

Sudhir from Udhampur was with a group of 12 when the "sky and earth seemed to collapse together".

"The whole area was filled with fog and dust," he recalled. "Most of my group members were trapped in slush. I saw dozens swept into the Chenab.

Rescue operation underway at an affected area following a cloudburst, in Kishtwar district in Jammu and Kashmir on Friday. At least 60 people were killed in the incident *PHOTO: PTI*

It took seconds for the hill to bury everything."

The swift action of officials, police, the Army, CRPF, and locals, including 20 bikers saved countless lives.

The state health and medical education department has reinforced critical infrastructure to ensure optimal patient care. A team of specialist doctors from PGI Chandigarh arrived in the state to bolster critical care capabilities.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi spoke with Jammu and Kashmir Chief Minister Omar Abdullah and Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha on 14 August and promised all necessary assistance. —*PTI*

Jammu and Kashmir LG Manoj Sinha with Chief Minister Omar Abdullah and others takes part in a Tiranga Rally in Srinagar *PHOTO: PTI*

J&K statehood: CM to start door-to-door campaign

SRINAGAR, 14 AUG

Chief Minister Omar Abdullah on Friday announced he would launch a massive signature campaign to press the demand for restoration of statehood to Jammu and Kashmir and present those signatures to the Supreme Court (SC).

Referring to SC's observations about the Pahalgam attack while hearing a plea for J&K's statehood, Abdullah said it is unfortunate that people of the region are being punished for a crime in which they played no role.

In his first Independence Day speech at Bakshi Stadium here since the state was downgraded to a union territory, the CM said the SC gave the government eight weeks to respond. "From today, we will use these eight weeks to go door to door in all 90 assembly segments for a signature campaign on the restoration of statehood. If people are not ready to sign the document, I will accept defeat," he said.

Abdullah also strongly criticised the practice of linking Jammu and Kashmir's political future to acts of terror, asserting that Pakistan cannot be allowed to influence decisions on the region's statehood through terrorism.

The CM said, "Will the killers of Pahalgam and their masters in the neighbouring country (Pakistan) decide whether we will be a state? Every time we are close to statehood, they will do something to sabotage it. Why are we being punished?" —*PTI*

WB nurse found dead at nursing home; murder alleged

KOLKATA, 15 AUG

A nurse was discovered dead at a nursing home in Singur, Hooghly district, with her body found hanging from the ceiling on the third floor. The incident occurred on Thursday, prompting police investigations.

The 24-year-old deceased nurse, a resident of Nandigram in Purba Medinipur district, had recently joined the nursing home just four days prior to her death. Her family alleges that she was sexually assaulted and murdered after revealing irregularities in the nursing home's operations. "We believe she was murdered," a family member stated, echoing concerns over the circumstances surrounding her death.

In contrast, the nursing home management has dismissed these allegations, claiming the nurse died by suicide. Police have commenced an investigation and are awaiting the autopsy report before determining further actions. "We are waiting for the autopsy report before taking any action," said a police officer.

The news has sparked protests from opposition parties, particularly the BJP and CPI(M), who have demanded justice for the nurse.

State minister Becharam Manna, the local TMC MLA, assured that if foul play is found in the police investigation, appropriate action would follow. —*PTI*

This Bengal stood tall and fought against foreign powers, injustice and oppression. The spirit of struggle runs in our blood. Even today, we roar against injustice.-

-Mamata Banerjee,
West Bengal Chief Minister

RG Kar rape: Victim's father moves HC

KOLKATA, 15 AUG

The father of the RG Kar Hospital rape-murder victim has appealed to the Calcutta High Court to overturn a lower court's ruling, which denied his lawyers access to the crime scene. He asserts that "other persons were present" alongside convicted rapist Sanjay Roy when the crime was committed. He urged for an independent examination to uncover potential oversight in the investigation. —PTI

Chief Minister of Odisha Mohan Charan Majhi during the the State level Independence Day parade in Bhubaneswar *PHOTO: PTI*

Odisha cops get total power to protect women

BHUBANESWAR, 15 AUG

During the Independence Day celebration at Mahatma Gandhi Marg, Odisha Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi announced that he has granted "absolute power" to the police to tackle crimes against women decisively. He declared that individuals involved in such offences should be imprisoned regardless of their influence.

Amid rising concerns from the opposition regarding law and order, Majhi asserted, "The law and order situation is under control, but we aim to strengthen it further." He identified intoxication as a significant contributor to crime and instructed the police to combat this issue.

Majhi also highlighted plans for special legislation aimed at eradicating organised crime, stating, "Extortion and similar activities are illegal and will be addressed firmly." He reaffirmed the government's commitment to women's safety in educational institutions through initiatives like 'Shaktishree'.

On women's empowerment, he noted that financial aid has reached over 1 crore women via the 'Subhadra Yojana', fostering small entrepreneurship, with 17 lakh 'lakhpati didis' emerging. He additionally revealed that the 2025-26 budget allocates Rs 89,861 crore for women's schemes, highlighting the focus on education, healthcare, and development. —*PTI*

Bihar levies Rs 100 fee on prelims of competitive exams

PATNA, 15 AUG

Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar announced a uniform fee of Rs 100 for all preliminary tests of competitive examinations in the state, while candidates will not be charged for the mains tests. This initiative aims to benefit numerous youths aspiring for government jobs.

Kumar made the announcement with the state assembly elections approaching, emphasising the significance of the move. "I am pleased to announce that a decision has been made to bring uniformity in the fees for preliminary tests (PT) of competitive examinations conducted by all commissions for state-level government jobs, and to provide significant fee concessions to candidates," he stated in a post on X in Hindi.

The recruitment exams are overseen by various commissions, including the Bihar Public Service Commission and the Bihar Staff Selection Commission. Kumar reiterated his government's commitment to youth employment: "To provide opportunities to the youth of the state and to secure their future, our government has taken several concrete steps." —*PTI*

SC not superior or inferior to HC: CJI

NEW DELHI, 15 AUG

Chief Justice of India (CJI) BR Gavai on Saturday said the Supreme Court collegium cannot direct a high court collegium to recommend specific names for judgeship, stressing both are constitutional courts with neither superior to the other. Speaking at the Supreme Court Bar Association's Independence Day event, he said the high court collegium must take the first call, with the Supreme Court only suggesting names for consideration. He praised the practice of candidate interactions, introduced under the former CJI as effective in assessing suitability. —*PTI*

Babu caught for taking bribes for illegal homes

MUMBAI, 15 AUG

Former Vasai-Virar civic commissioner Anil Pawar has been arrested for allegedly accepting substantial bribes to ignore rampant illegal construction, the Enforcement Directorate (ED) told a special court.

Pawar, along with town planner Y Shiva Reddy and builders Sitaram and Arun Gupta, was remanded in ED custody until 20 August. The agency claims Pawar formed a network of officials and intermediaries after taking charge in 2022, demanding huge commissions for building permissions.

The case concerns 41 illegal buildings erected on land reserved for civic amenities. The ED alleges the developer's fabricated approvals, deceived buyers and laundered proceeds through shell firms and dummy owners.

Builders admitted paying bribes to VVCMC officials, including Pawar, for not acting against unlawful projects. Raids were conducted in his homes. —*PTI*

10 killed, 35 injured in WB accident

BURDWAN, 15 AUG

Ten pilgrims from Bihar were killed and 35 injured when their bus hit a stationary truck in West Bengal's Burdwan district on Friday, officials said.

The victims, from Motihari in East Champaran, were returning home after visiting Gangasagar in South 24 Parganas when the crash occurred on NH-19 near Phaguipur in Purba Bardhaman. Among the dead were eight men and two women.

Injured being brought to a hospital after a bus rammed into a truck parked on NH-19, in Burdwan on Friday *PHOTO: PTI*

The injured, including six children, were admitted to Burdwan Medical College and Hospital. The bus carried 45 passengers. Their families were being contacted. —*PTI*

PRE-NATAL CARE

Paracetamol during pregnancy? Baby may get cognitive illness

Paracetamol may trigger oxidative stress, disrupt hormones and cause epigenetic behaviour, affecting the foetus *PHOTO: REPRESENTATIVE IMAGE*

NEW DELHI, 15 AUG

Taking paracetamol during pregnancy might increase the offspring's chances of developing neurodevelopmental disorders, including autism and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, according to a study.

Available over-the-counter, paracetamol, also known as 'acetaminophen' -- is considered safe for managing headache, fever, and pain during pregnancy.

Researchers analysed 46 previously published studies involving over a lakh participants across multiple countries.

Findings published in the journal BioMed Central show that higher-quality studies showed a link between prenatal acetaminophen exposure and increased risks of autism and ADHD.

"Given the widespread use of this medication, even a small increase in risk could have major public health implications," Diddier Prada, assistant professor of population health science and policy at the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai

The paper also explored biological mechanisms that could explain the association between acetaminophen use and these disorders.

Paracetamol is known to cross the placental barrier and may trigger oxidative stress, disrupt hormones, and cause epigenetic (gene behaviour resulting in observable traits) changes that interfere with brain development of the foetus.

With cases of autism and ADHD increasing globally, the findings have significant implications for public health policy, clinical guidelines, and patient education.

Even as the study does not show that paracetamol causes neurodevelopmental disorders in offsprings, evidence strengthens the connection and raises concerns about current clinical practices.

The authors suggested a cautious, time-limited use of paracetamol by pregnant women under medical supervision and called for more studies to confirm their findings. —*PTI*

HUMANOIDS IN THE RING

China has launched the first-of-its-kind humanoid sports game, taking sports to a whole other level. The World Humanoid Robot Games in Beijing includes various sports like boxing, football, and races, showing the technology's achievements and limitations. After China 2025 Spring Festival Gala saw a group of humanoids dancing, the country has been encouraging the adoption of embodied AI — AI that can learn, understand and respond instead of only existing

PHOTO: SCREENGRAB

Rezang La War Memorial: Tribute to 114 bravehearts

A few tent-like structures atop a nearby mountain are the first things to be noticed by a visitor at the Rezang La War Memorial on the high altitudes of the Chushul sector of eastern Ladakh.

Those are the last physical remnants of a daring battle fought by the Indian army against the invading Chinese forces in the winter of 1962 at over 16,000 ft above mean sea level, in which 114 officers and soldiers of the 13 Kumaon Regiment laid down their lives.

"Those are the very structures in which our forces were stationed when they took on the invading troops. It was the site where their bodies were recovered next spring," pointed an official of the Jammu and Kashmir Light Infantry (JAK LI), which is looking after the war memorial constructed on a nearby hillock.

The revamped Rezang La War Memorial was opened in November 2021 and is part of 'Bharat Ranbhoomi Darshan', an initiative by the Indian Army and the Ministry of Tourism to promote battlefield tourism in India.

The Memorial is just a short distance away from the Rezang La ('la' means pass in Tibetan language), which serves as the Line of Actual Control (LAC) between India and China now.

At the centre of the War Memorial is the 'Ahir Dham', commemorating the soldiers killed in the battle of Rezang La.

"All the personnel of the Charlie company of 13 Kumaon Regiment who were martyred were from the Ahir community. This plaque has been erected at the site where they were cremated," the official, conducting a tour of the Memorial, said.

"This is mostly a barren landscape, and there was not enough wood for making a pyre. Furniture used in the military establishments here was used to complete the pyre as the cremation took place with full military honours," he added.

The revamped Rezang La War Memorial was opened in 2021 and is part of an initiative by the Indian Army and the Ministry of Tourism to promote battlefield tourism in India ***PHOTO: MINISTRY OF DEFENCE***

Further inside is the memorial of Major Shaitan Singh, who had led the company and was awarded the country's highest military honour Param Vir Chakra (posthumously).

"The body of Major Singh could be identified with the help of the tattered shoulder badge. Only his body was flown back to his native place for cremation," the official said.

Commanding the infantry battalion divided into five platoon posts, Major Singh moved at great personal risk from one post to another sustaining the morale of his hard-pressed personnel.

When he fell disabled by wounds in his arms and abdomen, his men tried to evacuate him but Major Singh ordered them to leave him to his fate in order to save their lives, the official citation of the Param Vir Chakra mentions.

A guard of honour is presented daily at the memorial, typically when 100-150 visitors gather, with the site being a major tourist attraction.

Recalling the bravery of the fallen heroes during the Sino-Indian War, the official narrated how the 114 personnel, led by Major Singh, had fought in sub-zero temperatures on 18 November, 1962, against 5,000 Chinese troops.

All the Indian soldiers were killed in the battle, which was written in letters of gold in the annals of war history for the unmatched bravery and patriotism displayed by these personnel in the face of harsh weather, and outmatched by the enemy in numbers and weaponry.

"When the bodies were recovered in February 1963, there were many who still had a finger on the gun. The body of even the nursing assistant attached to the company was found with a syringe ready to be injected in his hand, showing how each performed his duty till the last breath," the JAK LI official said, pointing to the photographs of the martyred personnel at the memorial.

He also mentioned the lance naik in the Company, who was a former wrestler, and killed 10 Chinese soldiers with his bare hands after running out of ammunition and before falling to enemy bullets fired from a distance, citing instances of courage and undeterred spirit of the personnel.

The bravery of the Company has been recognised with one Param Vir Chakra, eight Vir Chakras, four Sena Medals and one Mentioned-in-Dispatches, making it among the most decorated companies in the Indian Army.

The War Memorial, with its display of personal items, weapons and ammunition recovered from the battle site at the high pass of Rezang La, stands as a stark reminder of sacrifices made in the defence of the nation, making the visitors bow their heads in reverence to the martyred men who fought that winter six decades ago *—PTI*

SALAR سالار

US-Russia Alaska summit to define Trump's second term

What happens when a convicted felon and a man under indictment for alleged war crimes get together? What sounds like the opening line of a great joke, sadly, is probably the defining meeting of the second term of Donald Trump as US President.

As with any meetings involving Trump, expectations are low and anxieties are high in the run-up to the US-Russia summit in Alaska on 15 August.

The White House, and Trump himself, have played down expectations of an imminent breakthrough towards peace in Ukraine, claiming that this would be "a feel-out meeting" to determine whether a ceasefire is possible.

In typical hyperbole, the US President added that he was confident that it would probably only take him two minutes to know whether a deal is possible.

A subsequent threat that "there will be very severe consequences" if Russian President Vladimir Putin does not agree to stop the fighting appears somewhat hollow now given that the reward for Putin ignoring Trump's last deadline was an invitation to the US.

While framed almost solely as a meeting about the Russian war against Ukraine, it would be naive to assume that this is all that is on Trump's agenda.

There are two possible deals Trump could try to make: a deal with Putin on a ceasefire for Ukraine and a deal resetting relations between Russia and the US. Trump is interested in both, and he does not see them as mutually exclusive.

Trump has long talked about a ceasefire, and is probably genuinely keen for the fighting to stop. He probably also sees value in a ceasefire agreement in his quest for the Nobel peace prize.

There have been serious and justified misgivings in Ukraine and among Kyiv's European allies that this two-way get-together will take place without any Ukrainian or European participation.

This has prompted a flurry of diplomatic activity within Europe and across the Atlantic. Ukraine's red lines have been clearly set out and fully backed by European leaders.

Neither will accept full legal recognition of the kinds of land swaps that both Trump and his secretary of state, Marco Rubio, have suggested. Security guarantees and Russian reparations for the damage done to Ukraine in three-and-a-half years of war are other likely stumbling blocs.

If there is a deal on a ceasefire, this will probably take the form of a broad and ambiguous framework that all sides would subsequently interpret differently. Part of such a framework would likely be a timeline and conditions for a Trump-Putin-Zelensky summit – most likely again without European participation.

This would be another gift for Putin as it would potentially put the Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy in a position where both Trump and Putin would pressure him to accept an unfavourable deal or lose all US support.

By contrast, a US-Russia reset would be a more straightforward business deal – primarily with US economic interests in mind, but with significant geopolitical implications. There are few signs that Trump has given up on his agenda to "un-unite" Russia and China.

But, importantly, this is less about new American alliances and more about Trump's ideas of re-ordering the world into American, Russian and Chinese spheres of influence. This would be easier to for the White House to achieve after a reset with Kremlin.

As an outcome of the Alaska summit, such a reset of US-Russia relations is also most likely to materialise as a framework that simply identifies areas for future deals between the two sides. Any process to implement such a bilateral agreement between Moscow and Washington could begin immediately and run in parallel to any Ukraine negotiations.

This, too, would be a big bonus for Moscow.

Putin is clearly more interested in improving bilateral relations with the US than he is in a ceasefire. He has, for now, skilfully avoided Trump's threats of sanctions while his forces have achieved what looks like an important breakthrough on the battlefield.

This is not necessarily a game changer in the war overall, but it certainly strengthens Putin's hand ahead of his meeting with Trump.

Putin might offer a limited pause in Russia's air campaign to avoid the civilian casualties that Trump has condemned. But as long as his ground troops make further territorial gains, he is unlikely to stop – at least until he has full control of the four Ukrainian regions that the Kremlin has claimed as Russian in addition to Crimea.

Ukraine, by contrast, needs a ceasefire now and then a credible peace deal in which any necessary concessions are minimal and which comes with proper security guarantees. The European-led coalition of the willing appears to offer such guarantees now, and Trump might even support this.

But this is no guarantee that the US President will not flip again to take Putin's side and push for an overly pro-Russian deal at a future three-way summit. During such a summit, even if it were just a scripted signing ceremony, there is every chance that Trump would go off-script or that Putin would manipulate him to do so.

This could then derail in a way similar to what happened during the White House row between Trump and Zelensky on 28 February.

Kyiv's European allies have made it clear that they will not abandon Ukraine. For all his deal-making bluster, a similar commitment is unlikely to be made by Trump. *—PTI*

Putin might offer a limited pause in Russia's air campaign to avoid the civilian casualties that Trump has condemned ***PHOTO: PTI***

LETTERS

write to us at salarenglishdigital@gmail.com

Global plastics treaty: Here's what went wrong, & how you can help

Progress towards a legally binding global treaty on plastics pollution stalled and went into reverse this week. The United Nations Intergovernmental Nego tiating Committee meeting in Geneva, Switzerland, ran overtime. It's likely to conclude this evening, without agreement.

This is an incredibly disappointing result. As a member of the Scientists' Coalition for an Effective Plastics Treaty, I was hoping for action to genuinely curb plastic pollution. Our priorities included considering the whole life cycle rather than just disposal, setting targets to reduce plastic production, and regulating the use of harmful additives to reduce risks to human health.

Unfortunately, vested interests hijacked the negotiations. Countries with major petrochemical producers resisted caps on virgin plastic production. We've seen this before. Legitimate scientific concerns about harm have been downplayed by powerful interests time and time again — with tobacco, PFAS, asbestos, and climate change.

When it comes to plastics — especially the micro- and nanoplastics now invading our bodies — awareness and early action could make all the difference. But we can still take action into our own hands as consumers, to minimise exposure and reduce waste. It we act together, we can also send a powerful message to the plastics manufacturing industry.

Why do we need a plastics treaty?

An ambitious plastic treaty could have a positive, lasting impact on the environment and human health.

The Montreal Protocol, adopted in 1987 to phase out ozone-depleting aerosols, is a great example of what can be achieved.

The original Kyoto Protocol for reducing greenhouse gas emissions, on the other hand, was not ambitious enough. It had fewer signatories and its effectiveness varied between countries. The plastics treaty is at a similar crossroads.

This treaty is a unique opportunity. It could ensure harmful additives are disclosed, new materials are proven safe before use, and upstream measures — such as reducing production and simplifying plastic chemistry — are prioritised.

Dissecting the changes

A promising draft treaty, circulated in December after two years of negotiations, was revised at the end of the first week of the summit, and then cut in half midway through the second week. All items of contention had been removed.

Words such as "target", "chemicals", "harmful" and "phase out" were absent. Article 19 — the one addressing human health — was deleted altogether. References to public awareness disappeared from the waste-management section.

Gone are plans to globally phase out specific products such as plastic bags and straws. So is the section on sustainable production and reduction targets. There is no mention of chemicals of concern, or transparency around additives. Even basic language about improving recycling rates, banning open burning and dumping, or encouraging behaviour change has been removed.

On a positive note, the revised draft still encourages innovation and research. But without safeguards, there's a risk efforts will simply consist of finding loopholes to dodge penalties. We've seen this before too: replacing one banned chemical with another unregulated, equally harmful one.

The Montreal Protocol, adopted in 1987 to phase out ozone-depleting aerosols, is a great example of what can be achieved ***PHOTO: PTI***

What can we do as consumers?

In the absence of a strong treaty — at least for now — we shouldn't underestimate the power and influence we have as consumers.

Industry does respond to public demand. Just look at what happened with plastic microbeads. These tiny pieces of plastic were once common in personal care products such as exfoliants, body scrubs and toothpastes. But when people started to reject products containing microbeads, recognising them as a source of microplastics, manufacturers took note.

- The original Kyoto Protocol for reducing greenhouse gas emissions, on the other hand, was not ambitious enough. It had fewer signatories and its effectiveness varied between countries. The plastics treaty is at a similar crossroads

Governments also stepped in. The Netherlands was the first country to ban them, soon followed by many others. Eventually, manufacturers phased plastic microbeads out of their product lines worldwide.

That shift was largely driven by popular pressure. It's a small win, but a telling one — a reminder that our choices can make a difference.

Did you know some of the biggest sources of microplastics are synthetic textiles and tyres? Together they contribute more than 60 per cent of primary microplastics. Microplastics are released not just when an item is discarded and decays in the oceans, but every time it's worn or washed.

Seemingly small actions – such as buying fewer clothes, choosing natural fibres where possible, washing less often, and walking or cycling instead of driving – can make a difference if we all act collectively.

It's also worth looking at other sources of microplastics in our surroundings, to limit exposure. Carpets are generally made of synthetic fibres that constantly shed microplastics. Exposure is significantly higher indoors, including inside cars – another reason to walk.

Don't wait for a treaty

Australia is not a big producer of raw polymers from fossil fuels. That may be partly why our nation is part of the High Ambition Coalition to End Plastic Pollution by 2040.

However, Australians consume more single-use plastic per capita than most other countries – more than 50 kilograms per person, per year.

We don't need to wait for a treaty to start curbing plastic pollution in our own lives. If we get serious about changing our ways, manufacturers may be forced to take notice *—PTI*

Alaska meet could decide fate of many

Trump's ability as a peacemaker is on the line while Putin eyes redemption

ANCHORAGE, 15 AUG

US President Donald Trump is meeting face-to-face with Russian President Vladimir Putin in Alaska on Friday for a high-stakes summit that could determine not only the trajectory of the war in Ukraine but also the fate of European security.

The sit-down offers Trump a chance to prove to the world that he is both a master deal-maker and a global peacemaker. For Putin, a summit with Trump offers a long-sought opportunity to try to negotiate a deal that would cement Russia's gains, block Kyiv's bid to join the NATO military alliance and eventually pull Ukraine back into Moscow's orbit. The exclusion of Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy from the summit also deals a heavy blow Kyiv's grapple with sovereignty and its own destiny as European leaders had put it. Zelenskyy has time and again cast doubts on Putin's willingness to negotiate in good faith.

Trump said in a Fox News radio interview Thursday that he didn't know if they would get "an im-mediate ceasefire" but he wanted a broad peace deal done quickly. That echoes Putin's longtime argument that Russia favours a comprehensive deal to end the fighting, reflecting its demands, not a temporary halt to hostilities.

Asked if the US is prepared to offer Putin access to rare minerals as an incentivise to end the war, Trump replied, "We're going to see what happens with our meeting.... But what I'm really doing this for is to save thousands of soldiers a week".

"I think President Putin will make peace and President Zelenskyy will make peace," Trump added. *—Agencies*

I am President, and (Vladimir is) not going to mess around with me. I'll know within the first two minutes, three minutes, four minutes or five minutes... whether or not we're going to have a good meeting or a bad meeting. And if it's a bad meeting, it'll end very quickly, and if it's a good meeting, we're going to end up getting peace in the pretty near future.

—Donald Trump, US President

(US is) making, in my opinion, quite energetic and sincere efforts to stop the hostilities, stop the crisis and reach agreements that are of interest to all parties involved in this conflict

—Vladimir Putin, Russian President

For Putin, a summit with Trump is and opportunity to pull Ukraine back into Moscow's orbit **PHOTO: X**

WHY IS ALASKA IMPORTANT?

Trump and Putin are set to meet at Alaska's largest military base at 11.30am local time on Friday (1am IST). Here are some reasons why the two world leaders agreed to meet at the tundra.

Proximity: Alaska is the closest point between the two countries, separated by 55 miles of the Ber-ing Strait.

Travel restrictions: Putin is wanted by 125 countries as a war criminal by the International Criminal Court (ICC). However, the US, and therefore Alaska, doesn't recognise the ICC.

Shipping, resources and research: Alaska sits near the Arctic Circle, something both countries are interested in researching through the Arctic Council. Alaska is of strategic significance because for Arctic energy resources, shipping routes and research.

SHARED HISTORY:

ALASKA WAS A RUSSIAN COLONY FOR 65 YEARS BEFORE THE US BOUGHT IT FOR $7.2 MILLION IN 1867.

WORLD WARS: Alaska serves as an important transit point, delivering thousands of aircrafts to the Soviet Union.

COLD WAR: Alaska was known as the 'first line of defence,' with US fearing that if the Soviets at-tacked, they would from the North. Alaska, therefore, houses a powerful defence radar system to detect bombs and missiles.

Symbolism: Alaska therefore highlights the cooperation between the two superpowers.

PHOTO: X

Turkish authorities detain Istanbul mayor

ANKARA, 15 AUG

Turkish authorities detained Inan Guney, the mayor of Istanbul's Beyoglu district, alongside around 40 officials on Friday, escalating a crackdown on the opposition. Guney's bodyguard, advisor, and other aides were also apprehended in an alleged corruption probe, according to the state-run Anadolu Agency. Beyoglu district is governed by the opposition party, Republican People's Party (CHP). Municipalities led by CHP have seen arrests, beginning with Istanbul Mayor Ekrem Imamoglu in March. Imamoglu, viewed as a challenger to President Recep Tayyip Erdogan in the 2028 elections, has faced legal challeng-es. Critics claim these are politically motivated, while the government asserts that the judi-ciary operates independently. *—PTI*

Jeff Bezos announces his mother's death

WASHINGTON, 15 AUG

Jeff Bezos announced the passing of his mother, Jacklyn Gise Bezos, aged 78, in an emotional Instagram post. Jacklyn, who succumbed to Lewy Body Dementia on 14 August, was remembered fondly. "She passed away today, surrounded by so many of us who loved her — her kids, grandkids, and my dad. I know she felt our love in those final moments," he wrote. His wife, Lauren Sanchez Bezos, commented, "We will miss her SO much. Love you." Jacklyn was a resilient single mother who later married Miguel "Mike" Bezos, who adopted Jeff. She was pivotal in establishing the Bezos Family Fund. *—Agencies*

Australian lawyer sorry for AI errors in murder case

MELBOURNE, 15 AUG

A senior Australian lawyer has issued an apology to a judge after submitting incorrect documents in a murder case that contained fake quotes and fictitious case citations generated by artificial intelligence. Rishi Nathwani, a King's Counsel, accepted "full responsibility" for the blunders in the Supreme Court of Victoria involving a teenager accused of murder. "We are deeply sorry and embarrassed," he said. The errors, discovered by the judge's associates, delayed the case's resolution by a day. Elliott emphasised the need for accuracy in legal submissions, noting that AI use must be "independently and thoroughly verified." The specific AI system used remains unidentified. *—PTI*

Residents carry out a rescue operation in Salarzai, in Bajaur district, in northwestern Pakistan **PHOTO: PTI**

Over 150 dead as heavy rains lash Pakistan, PoK

PESHAWAR/ISLAMABAD, 15 AUG

At least 154 people were killed and several injured as heavy rains lashed several parts of Pakistan and Pakistan-occupied Kashmir over the past 24 hours, officials said on Friday.

Most of the deaths occurred in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province after torrential rains triggered flash floods in various districts, while floods damaged scores of buildings and blocked major arteries, in-cluding the Karakoram Highway and Baltistan Highway in Gilgit-Baltistan in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK).

A total of 75 people died in Buner district, 17 in Mansehra and 18 each in Bajaur and Batagram dis-tricts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, local government officials said.

In Gilgit-Baltistan in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK), eight people died and two others went miss-ing as flash floods hit Ghizer district, officials said.

The floods damaged more than a dozen houses, several vehicles, schools, and health units, while blocking major arteries, including the Karakoram Highway and Baltistan Highway, at several points.

The floods also washed away two connecting bridges over Lawat Nullah, and the swollen Jagran Nullah tore away a bridge in Kundal Shahi.

In the Jhelum Valley, a cloudburst over Palhot unleashed a flash flood that damaged part of the road and left dozens of vehicles stranded.

With the Neelum River rising rapidly, authorities issued a flood warning and plan to relocate vul-nerable riverside families.

In PoK's Muzaffarabad district, a massive landslide in Sarli Sacha village hit a home, leaving six members of a family buried and feared dead. *—PTI*

BLA REJECTS US TERROR TAG: 'IT'S COLONIAL'

BALOCHISTAN, 15 AUG

The Baloch Liberation Army (BLA) has rejected the United States' decision to classify its unit, the Majeed Brigade, as a foreign terrorist organisation, describing the move as "detached from ground realities" and "an implicit endorsement of the colonial narrative by an international power".

BLA spokesperson Jeeyand Baloch said the group was neither surprised nor pressured by the des-ignation, asserting that the BLA is "a resistance force" operating solely against the military control of "the occupying state".

The statement dismissed the US designation as a reflection of "security, treaty, and geopolitical interests" rather than justice, arguing that such blacklists lack moral or legal legitimacy.

Jeeyand Baloch described the move as an attempt to "criminalise a seventy-five-year-old indige-nous resistance" and reaffirmed that the struggle falls within the bounds of international humani-tarian law. He said that if resistance against "oppression, genocide, and slavery" is justified elsewhere, "Balochistan is no exception."

He further linked the US stance to the region's rich mineral resources, accusing Pakistan of offering these to foreign corporations and turning Balochistan into a "silent economic colony."

According to him, all BLA attacks target the Pakistan Army, Frontier Corps, intelligence agencies, death squads, and allied armed groups in Balochistan. He denied accusations that the group targets civilians. *—ANI*

Border agent's murder: Vegan cult faces death sentence

Teresa Youngblut, charged by the FBI in the shooting death of U.S. Border Patrol Agent David Maland **PHOTO: DOJ**

WASHINGTON, 14 AUG

The chilling saga of the Zizians, a shadowy cult of radical computer scientists, took a darker turn Thursday as Teresa Youngblut, 21, was indicted for the murder of US Border Patrol agent David Ma-land — a charge that could lead to the death penalty.

Prosecutors say Youngblut gunned down Maland during a tense Vermont traffic stop on 20 January, the day Donald Trump returned the federal death penalty to life. Her companion, Felix Bauckholt, died in the ensuing shootout; Youngblut was wounded and arrested.

Zizians, a cultlike group of radical computer scientists focused on veganism, gender identity and artificial intelligence. They are linked to six killings across three states, weaving a trail of blood from a California landlord's murder to a Pennsylvania couple's deaths. Members allegedly bonded over anarchist ideals, veganism, and artificial intelligence — and carried out attacks with military preci-sion.

Federal prosecutors have until later this year to decide if Youngblut should face execution. Vermont has no state death penalty, but federal law could still send her to death row.

The pair were among the followers of Jack LaSota, a transgender woman also known as Ziz whose online writing attracted young, highly intelligent computer scientists who shared anarchist beliefs. Members of the group have been tied to the death of one of their own during an attack on a California landlord in 2022, the landlord's subsequent killing earlier this year, and the deaths of a Pennsylvania couple in between.

The group's leader remains jailed in Maryland, as investigators piece together the cult's violent web. LaSota and two others face weapons and drug charge. *—PTI*

DEA head is DC's 'emergency police commissioner'

The Trump administration has named the head of the Drug Enforcement Administration to be Washington's "emergency police commissioner" with all the powers of the police chief — a move that increases national control over the city as part of the federal government's law-enforcement takeover. Attorney General Pam Bondi said on Thursday that DEA boss Terry Cole will assume "powers and duties vested in the District of Columbia Chief of Police."

Texas Democrats to end nearly 2-week walkout

Texas Democrats on Thursday moved closer to ending a nearly two-week walkout that has blocked the GOP's redrawing of US House maps before the 2026 election and put them under escalating threats by Republicans back home. The Democrats will return provided that Texas Republicans end a special session and California releases its own redrawn map proposal, both of which were expected on Friday. Republican Texas Gov Greg Abbott still intends to push through new maps that would give the GOP five more winnable seats.

S Korea to restore military agreement

SEOUL, 15 AUG

In a significant diplomatic overture, South Korea's newly elected liberal president, Lee Jae Myung, announced on Friday his intention to restore a 2018 military agreement designed to minimise tensions along the border with North Korea. Lee urged Pyongyang to engage with Seoul to rebuild trust and foster dialogue amid escalating tensions linked to North Korean leader Kim Jong Un's nu-clear ambitions and closer ties with Russia.

The 2018 agreement, established during a phase of rapprochement under former liberal President Moon Jae-in, implemented buffer zones and no-fly areas to reduce the risk of clashes. However, the previous conservative administration suspended the pact in 2024 amid escalating provocations from the North.

In a televised address, Lee expressed respect for North Korea's existing regime and assured that South Korea has no intentions of pursuing unification through coercive means. *—PTI*

Serbian riot police clash with protesters during an antigovernment demonstration in Belgrade

Lawsuit challenges Don's DC takeover

WASHINGTON, 14 AUG

The nation's capital challenged President Donald Trump's takeover of its police department in court on Friday.

District of Columbia Attorney General Brian Schwalb said in a new lawsuit that Trump is going far beyond his power under the law. Schwalb asked a judge to find that control of the department remains in district hands.

"The administration's unlawful actions are an affront to the dignity and autonomy of the 700,000 Americans who call DC home. This is the gravest threat to Home Rule that the District has ever faced, and we are fighting to stop it," Schwalb said. *—PTI*

WORLD STAYS MUM

4 yrs of Taliban rule: Afghans suffer silently

MELBOURNE, 15 AUG

On 15 August, 2021, Afghanistan's democratic republic collapsed. As the last US and NATO troops departed the country, the Taliban swept back into power and the Afghan people braced for an un-certain future.

Despite promises of moderation and inclusion, four years later, the Taliban has established a re-pressive, exclusionary regime – one that has dismantled institutions of law, justice and civil rights with ruthless efficiency.

As the Taliban regime has tightened its grip, international attention has waned. Crises in Ukraine, Gaza and elsewhere have dominated the global agenda, pushing Afghanistan out of the spotlight.

Taliban discarded the country's 2004 Constitution, allowing the regime to operate without a transparent rule of law. Instead, Mullah Hibatullah Akhundzada, the reclusive Taliban leader, rules by decree from his base in Kandahar.

The Taliban's repression of women and girls has been so severe, human rights groups now call it "gender apartheid". Taliban rule has also led to the exclusion and persecution of minority ethnic and religious groups such as Hazaras, Shias, Sikhs and Christians.

Although most countries do not recognise Taliban as the formal government, some have called for an easing of its international isolation. Last month, Russia became the first country to recognise the Taliban. China is also deepening its eco-nomic and diplomatic ties. India's Foreign Minister met with his Taliban counterpart, after which the Taliban called New Delhi a "significant regional partner".

However, experts warn of a rising trend of similarly styled repression, dubbed "Talibanisation", tak-ing root in other countries. In Yemen, for example, Houthi leaders have imposed restrictions similar to Taliban edicts, banning women from walking in public without a male guardian and restricting their work.

Without international pressure, the suffering of the Afghan people will only worsen and the Taliban's brand of repression will continue. *—PTI*

The toll is devastating as women & girls are systematically erased from schools, work & public life **PHOTO: X**

Serbia protests continue for third night amid polls

BELGRADE, 15 AUG

Thousands of protesters took to the streets for a third consecutive night on Thursday, targeting the ruling Serbian Progressive Party (SNS) headquarters in Novi Sad, the epicentre of the country's anti-government movement for over nine months.

The unrest intensified following earlier clashes that led to numerous detentions and injuries. Demonstrators are demanding President Aleksandar Vucic to call early elections. In Novi Sad, protestors expressed their anger over alleged corruption linked to last year's train station canopy collapse that killed 16. Vucic condemned the protests as the actions of "violent agita-tors," insisting, "The state will win." *—ANI*

Air Canada cancels flights ahead of massive strike

TORONTO, 15 AUG

PHOTO: WIKIPEDIA

Air Canada started cancelling flights on Thursday ahead of a possible work stoppage by flight at-tendants that could impact hundreds of thousands of travelers. A complete shutdown of the coun-try's largest airline threatens to impact about 1,30,000 people a day.

The union representing around 10,000 Air Canada flight attendants issued a 72-hour strike notice Wednesday. In response, the airline issued a lockout notice.

Mark Nasr, Chief Operations Officer for Air Canada, said the airline has begun a gradual suspension of Air Canada and Air Canada Rouge operations.

"All flights will be paused by Saturday early morning," he said. Nasr said this approach will help facil-itate an orderly restart "which under the best circumstances will take a full week to complete."

"By the time we get to 1am on Saturday morning we will be completely grounded," Nasr added.

They expect 500 flights to be cancelled by the end of Friday.

The union has said its main sticking points revolve around what it calls flight attendants' "poverty wages" and unpaid labour when planes aren't in the air. *—PTI*

Cement sector sees subdued growth in Q2FY26: Nuvama

NEW DELHI, 15 AUG

India's cement sector is projected to experience subdued volume growth in Q2FY26 due to seasonal factors, though rising realisations provide a positive outlook, according to a Nuvama report. While operating deleverage and heightened expenses may compress margins, easing fuel prices and cost-efficiency initiatives are likely to mitigate the impact. The report noted, "We believe Q2FY26 will witness subdued volume growth... improving realisations have brought cheer." In the first quarter of FY26, 15 major companies recorded a 7 per cent sales volume growth year-on-year, driven by government infrastructure spending. Despite the usual slow-down during monsoon, profit per tonne improved significantly, reaching Rs 1,140 per tonne. *—PTI*

Bihar, IIT Delhi partner for AI-led bridge operations

NEW DELHI, 15 AUG

Bihar's Road Construction Department has partnered with IIT Delhi to launch an advanced certification programme focused on AI-driven bridge management. This initiative follows a troubling trend of bridge collapses in recent years, with a dozen incidents reported within 15 days during last monsoon. Starting in September 2025, the six-month programme aims to train over 100 engineers in AI/ML analysis and real-time monitoring systems. Bihar Minister Nitin Nabin stated, "This training will enable our engineers to independently manage all state bridges using cutting-edge AI tools." The programme aligns with Bihar's inaugural Bridge Management & Maintenance Policy, 2025, which aims to lessen reliance on external consultants. *—PTI*

PHOTO: BSNL

BSNL announces soft launch of 4G services in Delhi

NEW DELHI, 15 AUG

BSNL announced the soft launch of its 4G mobile services in Delhi, providing users with immediate access via a partner's network access arrangement. "With this, new customers will get instant 4G availability across Delhi on supported handsets," stated BSNL CMD A Robert J Ravi. The service operates on a "4G-as-a-service" model, enabling citywide coverage while BSNL continues to build its indigenous network. Customers can obtain SIM cards and related services at BSNL and MTNL outlets. The telecom provider's 4G rollout followed a hefty investment of Rs 25,000 crore, which included the installation of 1 lakh mobile towers. *—PTI*

4th meeting of India-Singapore JWGTI concludes

NEW DELHI, 15 AUG

The 4th meeting of the India-Singapore joint working group on Trade & Investment (JWGTI) took place at Vanijya Bhawan in New Delhi on Thursday, bringing the two nations together to strengthen economic cooperation and chart future areas of partnership. According to a Ministry of Commerce and Industry press release, the discussions centred on expanding trade and investment links, identifying priority sectors for alignment, improving logistics and supply chain efficiency, simplifying regulations, and enhancing cross-border trade facilitation. The talks were co-chaired by Rajesh Agrawal, Special Secretary, Department of Commerce, Ministry of Commerce and Industry, and Beh Swan Gin, Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Trade and Industry, Singapore. *—ANI*

Big bang GST reform soon, only 5%, 18% slabs to stay

Govt to reform 8-year-old regime plagued by litigations, evasions

NEW DELHI, 15 AUG

GST, which subsumed a host of taxes and local levies, was rolled out on 1 July, 2017
PHOTO: FREEPIK

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday announced plans for big bang reforms in the GST regime by Diwali, which will bring down prices of everyday items, as his government looks to overhaul the eight-year-old tax structure plagued by compliance issues, evasions and litigation.

The present GST tax rates of nil/zero on essential food items, 5 per cent on daily use products, 12 per cent on standard goods, 18 per cent on electronics and services and 28 per cent on luxury and sin goods will be replaced by by a two tax slabs of 5 per cent and 18 per cent plus a special 40 per cent top bracket for 5-7 demerit goods.

While essential food items, medicines and education will continue to be taxed at zero rate in the proposed revamped goods and services tax (GST) regime, 99 per cent of items in the current 12 per cent slab will move to the 5 per cent bracket. Services will continue to be charged at 18 per cent, except insurance, whose tax rates are not yet clear.

But the biggest beneficiary of the rejig would be electronics items like ACs, TVs, fridges, washing machines and cement that, along with 90 per cent of the items currently being charged at a 28 per cent tax rate, would move to the 18 per cent bracket.

A special tax rate of 40 per cent - the maximum rate allowed under the GST law - would be charged for demerit and sin goods like tobacco, gutka, and pan masala, as well as online gaming, highly placed sources told reporters soon after the Prime Minister's announcement of GST revamp in his Independence Day address to the nation.

Sources, however, did not say how automobiles, which are currently in the highest tax bracket, would be charged in the revamped regime.

They said tobacco and other such products would continue to attract a total incidence of 88 per cent tax, the same as currently, and a separate levy will be brought in.

Petroleum products, such as petrol, diesel, natural gas, ATF and crude oil, will continue to remain outside the GST, as they remain a major source of revenue for states.

When GST was implemented from 1 July, 2017, it subsumed central levies like excise duty and service tax and state taxes like VAT into one levy. However, petroleum products, for the time being, and alcohol were kept out of it.

"This Diwali, I am going to make it a double Diwali for you," Modi said in his address. *—PTI*

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman after hoisting the national flag during the 79th Independence Day celebration
PHOTO: PTI

FinMin proposes 2-tier GST structure to Group of Ministers

NEW DELHI, 15 AUG

The finance ministry on Friday said it has proposed a two-slab GST rate structure to the Group of Ministers (GoM), along with special rates for select few items, as the government looks to unveil "next generation" GST reforms in the current financial year which will lower tax burden on daily use items.

The Centre has proposed to a panel of state finance ministers that the Goods and Services tax (GST) regime should have just two slabs where goods and services can be classified as 'standard' and 'merit'. Also, special rates can be levied on select items which will be specified.

Currently, GST is a four-tier tax structure of 5, 12, 18 and 28 per cent, where essential items are either exempted or taxed at the lower tax bracket, while demerit and luxury items at the highest slab. Besides, a compensation cess is levied at varied rates on demerit and luxury items like pan masala and cars.

With the compensation cess regime coming to an end on 31 March, 2026, the GST Council will also have to work out a mechanism regarding the rates of tax that can be levied on goods which currently attract compensation cess.

The GST Council, chaired by Finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman and comprising state ministers, is expected to meet in September to discuss the GoM proposal on rate rationalisation.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi in his address to the nation on 79th Independence Day announced that 'next generation' GST reforms, soon after which the ministry said the Centre has shared its GST proposal to GoM which rests on three pillars -- structural reforms, rate rationalisation and ease of living. *—PTI*

S&P Global upgrades ratings of 10 financial institutions

NEW DELHI, 15 AUG

S&P has raised long-term issuer credit ratings on seven Indian banks and three finance companies
PHOTO: PTI

S&P Global Ratings on Friday upgraded ratings of top 10 financial institutions, including SBI, HDFC Bank and Tata Capital, a day after the US-based agency raised India's sovereign credit rating.

"India's financial institutions will continue to ride the country's good economic growth momentum. These entities will benefit from their domestic focus and structural improvements in the system such as in the recovery of bad loans," S&P said.

S&P has raised long-term issuer credit ratings on seven Indian banks -- State Bank of India, ICICI Bank, HDFC Bank, Axis Bank Ltd, Kotak Mahindra Bank, Union Bank of India, and Indian Bank -- and three finance companies -- Bajaj Finance, Tata Capital, and L&T Finance.

"We expect India's banks to maintain adequate asset quality, good profitability, and enhanced capitalization over the next 12-24 months. This is despite some pockets of stress," S&P said, adding, credit risk in the system has reduced.

S&P had on Thursday upgraded India's credit rating to 'BBB', after a gap of over 18 years, as it expects India's sound economic fundamentals to underpin growth momentum over the next 2-3 years.

The ratings on many Indian financial institutions are capped by our sovereign rating on India. This is due to the direct and indirect influence that the sovereign has on financial institutions operating in the country, S&P said.

It also said that the insolvency and bankruptcy code (IBC) has improved the payment culture and rule of law in India. The code has tilted the balance in favour of the creditors. It has also promoted a credit culture that encourages restructuring of going-concern entities. *—PTI*

'RBI's FREE-AI to help financial sector'

NEW DELHI, 15 AUG

The framework aims to ensure safe, fair, accountable, and inclusive AI adoption in financial institutions
PHOTO: PTI

The endeavour of the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) to democratise the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in the financial sector will open new doors to players as regulator-backed measures such as AI sandboxes, sectoral datasets, and indigenous models can significantly reduce the cost and risk of experimentation, say top executives of the financial service companies.

Top executives said that it is a unique opportunity to blend regulatory trust with speed and agility in niche markets, previously out of reach due to high barriers to entry.

On 13 August, the RBI's committee unveiled the Framework for Responsible and Ethical Enablement of Artificial Intelligence (FREE-AI), marking a significant step in balancing technological innovation with robust risk management in the financial services ecosystem. The framework aims to ensure safe, fair, accountable, and inclusive AI adoption in financial institutions. It outlines seven foundational principles (or 'sutras'), which are operationalised through twenty-six targeted recommendations structured under six strategic pillars: Governance, Data, Fairness, Transparency, Accountability, and Risk Management.

Dewang Neralla, CEO of HiWiPay, welcomed the initiative, further added that the framework could unlock entirely new categories of financial products.

The FREE-AI framework is part of RBI's long-term vision to harness the benefits of these innovations while ensuring systemic safety. *—ANI*

GTRI: India facing tough choices in countering tariffs

NEW DELHI, 15 AUG

On its Independence Day, India finds itself grappling with significant choices in response to steep tariffs imposed by the US. The Global Trade Research Initiative (GTRI) has characterised the situation as a "bruising trade confrontation" following the Trump administration's decision to impose a 50 per cent country-specific tariff on most Indian goods, intensifying existing most favoured nation duties.

Ajay Srivastava, Founder of GTRI, outlined India's stark options: "negotiate, retaliate, diversify markets or offer trade concessions such as ending purchases of Russian oil for tariff relief."

Srivastava emphasised that structural reforms and aggressive trade diplomacy are crucial for India to mitigate the tariff impact and explore new export avenues in regions like Europe, ASEAN, and Africa. He projected that initial gains might only recover USD 10–15 billion of the USD 50 billion lost. *—PTI*

CII Mysuru to host 'Integrate 2025' on 21 & 22 August

MYSURU, 15 AUG

Mysuru's Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) is set to host the Integrate 2025 — two-day buyer-seller meet, industrial exhibition and conference on 21 and 22 August at the Jagannatha Centre for art & culture in Mysuru. The initiative promotes business sustainability through stronger local procurement linkages, MSME collaboration and sound supply-chain management. Nearly 200 delegates, are expected.

The meet helps attract more industries while enabling MSMEs to showcase capabilities to buyers. It will also feature Re-Integrate, a social initiative supporting qualified and experienced women to restart their careers while creating a valuable talent pool for local MSMEs. *—Salar News*

RSB Retail files IPO to raise Rs 1,500 cr

NEW DELHI, 15 AUG

RSB Retail India Ltd, a prominent multi-brand retail chain operating in south India, has submitted preliminary documents to the Securities and Exchange Board of India (Sebi) for an initial public offering (IPO) that could potentially raise around Rs 1,500 crore.

The proposed IPO comprises a fresh issue of equity shares worth up to Rs 500 crore and an offer for sale (OFS) of approximately 2.98 crore equity shares from its promoters, as detailed in the draft red herring prospectus filed on Thursday.

Founded in 2008, RSB Retail provides a diverse range of apparel, catering to premium, mid-premium, and value segments. As of 31 March, 2025, it operated 73 stores across 22 cities in Telangana, Andhra Pradesh, and Karnataka, and revenues of Rs 2,694 crore with a profit of Rs 104.4 crore. *—PTI*

Reliance 'Digital India Sale' is Here

India's largest electronics retailer, Reliance Digital, brings you the much-awaited 'Digital India Sale', live till 17 August 2025. This Independence Day, enjoy up to 25 per cent savings – including 10 per cent instant discount (up to Rs 15,000) on SBI Bank cards and 15 per cent in gift vouchers. Additionally, get attractive payment options like 1 Free EMI and an additional 5 per cent unlimited discount on UPI payments on select accessories. Shop across Reliance Digital, My Jio, and JioMart Digital stores, or online at www.reliancedigital.in and take home the technology you've been waiting for.

Reliancedigital
PERSONALISING TECHNOLOGY

Top offers include:
Televisions: 140 cm (55) UHD Google TV at Rs 24,990; 108 cm (43) FHD at Rs 12,990.

Apple Products: iPhone 13 from Rs 39,900; MacBook Air with Apple Intelligence from Rs 49,999.

Washing Machines:
Smart AI all-in-one Washer Dryer at Rs 49,990 with freebies worth Rs 8,990.

Accessories:
Unlimited 5 per cent off on UPI payments for personal audio, smartwatches, telecom & IT accessories.

Refrigerators & ACs:
Assured freebies up to Rs 8,990 on Side-by-Side/ Double Door refrigerators; 1.5T 3 Star ACs from Rs 19,990.

Kitchen & Home Appliances:
Buy more, save more – Buy 1, get 5 per cent off; Buy 2, get 10 per cent off; Buy 3, get 15 per cent off.

'BUSINESS AS USUAL'

India buys 2M barrels per day of Russian oil in August

NEW DELHI, 15 AUG

India's purchase of Russian oil has risen to 2 million barrels per day in August, as refiners continue to prioritise economic considerations in their sourcing decisions.

As much as 38 per cent out of an estimated 5.2 million barrels per day of crude oil imported in the first half of August came from Russia, according to global real-time data and analytics provider Kpler.

Imports from Russia at 2 million bpd were up from 1.6 million bpd in July. The increase in Russian flow was at the cost of purchases from Iraq, which declined to 730,000 bpd in August from 907 bpd in July, and Saudi Arabia which fell to 526,000 bpd from 700,000 bpd last month.

The US was the fifth largest supplier at 264,000 bpd, according to Kpler.

"Russian crude imports into India have so far remained resilient in August, even after the Trump administration's tariff announcement in late July 2025," said Sumit Ritolia, Lead Research Analyst (Refining & Modeling) at Kpler. "But the stability we're seeing now is mostly a result of timing - August cargoes were locked in back in June and early July, well before any policy shifts."

What's showing up in the data today reflects decisions made weeks ago, he said, adding any real adjustment in flows - whether due to tariffs, payment issues, or shipping friction - will only start becoming visible from late September through October arrivals.

He noted that there's been no government directive to cut Russian volumes. "So from a policy standpoint, it's business as usual".

Arvinder Singh Sahney, chairman of Indian Oil Corporation - India's largest oil firm - too said the government has not given any instruction to go slow on purchases from Moscow in the aftermath of President Donald Trump's decision to slap an additional 25 per cent tariff on US imports from India -- raising the overall duty to 50 per cent -- as a penalty for the country's continued imports of Russian oil.

Separately, Bharat Petroleum Corporation Ltd (BPCL) Director (Finance) Vetsa Ramakrishna Gupta on an investor call said imports from Russia had declined last month from 34 per cent of overall imports in June quarter, as discounts on it had narrowed to USD 1.5 per barrel.

India, the world's third-largest oil consumer and importer, had swiftly substituted market-priced oil with discounted Russian crude following Western sanctions on Moscow after its invasion of Ukraine in February 2022.

Russian oil, which accounted for less than 0.2 per cent of India's imports before the war, now makes up 35-40 per cent of the country's crude intake.

The discounts however have narrowed from a high of USD 40 per barrel to just USD 1.5 last month.

Discounts this month have risen to over USD 2 per barrel. *—PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

Gukesh slips to tied sixth at St. Louis Rapid

ST. LOUIS, 15 AUG

World Champion D Gukesh scored one win and four draws to slip to joint sixth spot in the St. Louis Rapid and Blitz chess tournament, a part of the Grand Chess Tour. Gukesh needs to score massively in the second half as only nine blitz games are left for him to stage a comeback. Levon Aronian of the United States took the sole lead scoring 6/9, and is sitting pretty in the event ahead of overnight leader and compatriot Fabiano Caruana. While Aronian has a total of 19 points, Caruana is two points behind him and only a half point ahead of third-placed Maxime Vachier-Lagrave of France. Uzbek Grandmaster Nodirbek Abdusattorov made a comeback of sorts, matching Aronian on points in the blitz, and jumped to joint fourth place alongside Wesley So of the United States, with both having 15 points each.—*PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

Portland Classic: Aditi lies 32nd, Gurleen tied 2nd

PORTLAND, 15 AUG

Indian golfer Aditi Ashok produced four birdies in a row towards the end of her first round to make a solid start at The Standard Portland Classic. She shot 3-under 69 and was Tied-32nd.Four pars at the start from the 10th were followed by a birdie on the 14th and then bogeys on the 18th and the third, at which point she was 1-over. Then came a birdie run with four in a row from fifth to the eighth for a 3-under 69. Two-time champion Brooke Henderson birdied all four par-5 holes for a 7-under 65 and was a stroke behind first-round leader Adela Cernousek.Henderson is tied second with four others, including Gurleen Kaur tied 2nd, a first-generation Indian-American. The 25-year-old Gurleen played the 2021 US Women's Open and cut. —*PTI*

Ankita Dhyani sets National record in 2000m steeplechase

NEW DELHI, 15 AUG

Olympian Ankita Dhyani broke the women's 2000m steeplechase national record while winning gold at the Grand Slam Jerusalem athletics meet in Israel. The 23-year-old Ankita clocked 6 minutes 13.92 seconds to better the previous national mark of 6:14.38, held by Parul Chaudhary. With the ranking points she earned from the win on Thursday, Ankita boosted her chances of qualifying for the 3000m steeplechase for the World Championships in Tokyo next month through the world ranking quota. "Yes, under the rules, the performance of 2000m steeplechase will be counted for world ranking purposes in 3000m steeplechase for the World Championships—*PTI*

Leipzig signs Brazilian striker Romulo for a $29 M

LEIPZIG, 15 AUG

Leipzig is spending a big chunk of the fee from Benjamin Sesko's move to Manchester United on his Brazilian replacement, Rômulo. Leipzig signed the 23-year-old striker on a five-year contract on Friday from Goztepe, where he scored 17 goals in the Turkish league and cup last season. Germany's Kicker magazine reported Leipzig is paying a total of up to 25 million euros ($29.2 million), with 20 million euros of that sum as a transfer fee and the rest in potential add-ons.—*PTI*

India A women clinch ODI series with thrilling win

Yastika, Radha, and Tanuja strike fifties against Australia A

Radha Yadav of India A bats during game of the ODI Women's Series between Australia A and India A *PHOTO: PTI*

BRISBANE, 15 AUG

Fine half-centuries from Yastika Bhatia, Radha Yadav, and Tanuja Kanwar propelled India A to a thrilling series-clinching two-wicket victory over Australia A after Alyssa Healy's brilliant knock had set the bar high for the visitors in the second women's one-dayer, here on Friday.

Following the win, achieved with just one ball to spare, India has taken a 2-0 lead in the three-match series of the multi-format tour. India A had lost the three-match T20 series 0-3.

Chasing a healthy 265 for 9, built largely on Australian skipper Healy's 87-ball 91, India were in doldrums at 193 for 7 after losing Yastika (66 off 71 balls) and Radha (60 off 78 balls).

But spin-bowling all-rounder Tanuja rose to the occasion by batting responsibly for her 50 (57 balls) to fashion a fight back as India A won on the second-last ball of the match.

Left-arm spinner Tanuja forged a 68-run stand for the eighth wicket with Prema Rawat (32 not out), who has been brilliant with the ball in the series, as the duo took it upon themselves to thwart the home team's challenge.

The pair subdued their attacking instinct and focused on the huge task at hand. They relied on quick running between the wickets, and gradually their partnership blossomed into a match-winning stand.

Tanuja was unlucky to be dismissed with the target in sight. Australia A: 265 for 9 in 50 overs (Alyssa Healy 91, Kim Garth 41 not out; Minnu Mani 3/46).

India A: 266 for 8 in 49.5 overs (Yastika Bhatia 66, Radha Yadav 60, Tanuja Kanwar 50, Prema Rawat 32 not out; Amy Edgar 2/55). —*PTI*

Prasad set to contest in KSCA elections

Former India pacer Venkatesh Prasad is set to contest in the upcoming Karnataka State Cricket Association (KSCA) elections, which are tentatively to be held between October and November.

Prasad, a well-experienced coach, selector, and administrator, had served as a vice-president from 2013 to 2016 when Anil Kumble was the KSCA president. But since then, Prasad stayed away from administration to focus on a coaching career, along with dabbling in the media world as a pundit and commentator.

FIRST STOP IS KOLKATA

Messi's India tour gets final seal of approval

KOLKATA, 15 AUG

Lionel Messi's much-anticipated visit to India has received its final seal of approval, with the Argentine superstar set to kick off his three-city tour in Kolkata on 12 December, promoter of the event Satadru Dutta said on Friday.

As earlier reported by PTI, the football-mad city of Kolkata will be the first stop in Messi's whirlwind trip named 'GOAT Tour of India 2025', followed by Ahmedabad, Mumbai and New Delhi.The visit will conclude after a meeting with Prime Minister Narendra Modi at his residence on December 15.This will be the Argentine great's first trip to India since 2011, when he visited the country with his national team to play a FIFA friendly against Venezuela at the Salt Lake Stadium here.

Lionel Messi *PHOTO: PTI*

"I got the authorisation and afterwards made it official (on social media). Messi will post any day between August 28 and September 1 with the official poster with all details and a small introduction of his tour," Dutta told PTI, confirming his visit.

"I explained the plan and what we wanted to do. He seemed convinced it was worth it and committed to coming," Dutta said. Messi's entourage may also include Inter Miami teammates Rodrigo De Paul, Luis Suarez, Jordi Alba and Sergio Busquets, among others, but Dutta refused to divulge any names. He will land in Kolkata on the night of 12 December and spend two days and one night in his longest stop on the tour. In Delhi on December 15, Messi will meet PM Modi at his residence before attending the GOAT Concert and GOAT Cup at Feroz Shah Kotla. Sources revealed that the Delhi District Cricket Association is also inviting Virat Kohli and Shubman Gill, who is a big "Messi fan", a day after playing India's third T20I against South Africa in Dharamsala. —*PTI*

CHENNAI GRAND MASTERS

Vincent Keymer wins final fixture to secure top 10 spot

CHENNAI, 15 AUG

Germany's Vincent Keymer closed off his title-clinching run at the Chennai Grand Masters 2025 with a convincing win in the final round against American GM Ray Robson here on Friday.

The result meant Keymer ended his unbeaten campaign with a remarkable tally of seven points; a sparkling performance which helped the 20-year-old enter the top 10 in world ranking (live ratings) for the first time in his career. "I think this is my highest performance in a classical tournament. It's just a very nice feeling to play good chess, and the event has gone fantastically. I do have the habit of ruining very nice tournaments. I was dangerously close to repeating that same mistake yesterday. Very glad I didn't go that far," said Keymer. On Friday, Keymer pounced on a mid-game error from Robson (31. Rxc8) to flip an equal game into his favour. The German GM closed off the game quickly from thereon to claim his fifth win of the tournament. —*PTI*

Vincent Keymer *PHOTO: PTI*

Olympic-style torch relay flags off Fit India Andaman Nicobar

PORT BLAIR, 15 AUG

The Fit India Andaman Nicobar Khel Mahotsav, featuring inter-school competitions in athletics, football, volleyball, and indigenous games, along with cultural performances celebrating the union territory's diversity, got underway here on Friday.

The festival that runs till August 31 will also have beach sports, kayaking demonstrations, rope skipping challenges, and mass fitness drills besides anti-drug and health awareness drives, according to a Sports Authority of India (SAI) release.

The opening ceremony at Netaji Stadium saw Lieutenant Governor Lt Gen (Retd) Admiral DK Joshi flag off three Olympic-style 'Flame of Fitness' torches, symbolising the values of 'Excellence, Friendship and Respect'.

Each torch will travel through one of the three districts, carried by former footballer Anand Lawson (Nicobar), former para National gold medallist Prachi Toppo (South Andaman), and former India canoeist and kayaker Regina Kiro (North & Middle Andaman).

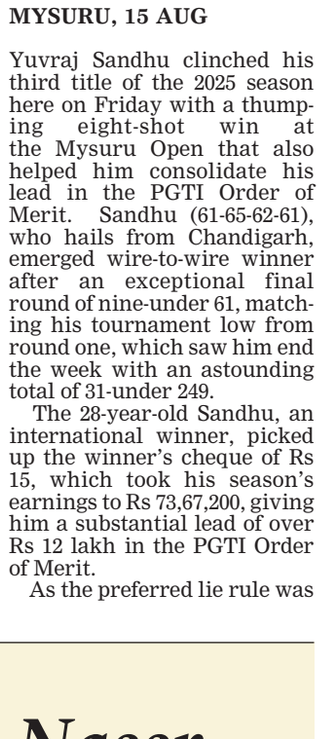


PHOTO: AI

The handcrafted torches featuring the Cellular Jail silhouette, dugong and hornbill engravings, and a mangrove-root motif will travel by land and sea to the remotest parts, covering hundreds of kilometres of the archipelago.

"It's an opportunity to celebrate and reinvigorate the culture of sport in the Andaman & Nicobar Islands, encouraging participation at every level and fostering pride in our unique heritage," stated Chief Secretary, Andaman & Nicobar Islands, Chandra Bhushan Kumar.

Regional director of SAI Kolkata Amar Jyoti said: "Har Dweep, Har Kinara, Khele Sara Dweep Hamara is not just a tagline it reflects the essence of a healthy and active life for every islander." —*PTI*

Aaditya slams BCCI over India-Pak Asia Cup matches

MUMBAI, 15 AUG

Shiv Sena (UBT) leader Aaditya Thackeray on Friday targeted the BCCI over India-Pakistan cricket matches in the Asia Cup and said after so many efforts of the Union government to tell the world that Islamabad is behind the Pahalgham attack, the "greed for money of the cricketing body stands above the sacrifice of the armed forces".He said it will be a real shame if the BCCI (Board of Control for Cricket in India) thinks it's above what Prime Minister Narendra Modi said from the Red Fort during the Independence Day speech. —*PTI*

Cincinnati Open: Gauff cruises into Quarters, to face Jasmine

CINCINNATI, 15 AUG

Coco Gauff eased past Lucia Bronzetti on Thursday to book a Cincinnati Open quarter-final meeting with Jasmine Paolini, although the American showed signs of some minor rust after receiving a bye in the previous round. Gauff got a free pass into the last 16 when her intended opponent, Dayana Yastremska, withdrew before the start with injury. But the 21-year-old put her relative lack of time on the court behind her as she won through 6-2, 6-4 against Bronzetti to reach the last eight, despite suffering early breaks of serve in both sets. Gauff will be playing her third 1000-level quarter-final of the season after Madrid and Rome, both of which she went on to reach the final.

Coco Gauff *PHOTO: PTI*

She will next meet the player who downed her in the Rome final, after Paolini brushed aside two-time Grand Slam champion Barbora Krejcikova 6-1, 6-2 in the day's second match on center court.

Gauff said after defeating Bronzetti that memories of her 2023 title success at Cincinnati come to the surface whenever she is in the tournament's showpiece arena. "It's super special to play on this court. I have so many memories from 2023. "I played controlled but aggressive, but sometimes I was a bit passive.

It's tough because the ball flies, and she was giving me no pace. —*PTI*

Sandhu wins Mysuru Open

MYSURU, 15 AUG

Yuvraj Sandhu clinched his third title of the 2025 season here on Friday with a thumping eight-shot win at the Mysuru Open that also helped him consolidate his lead in the PGTI Order of Merit. Sandhu (61-65-62-61), who hails from Chandigarh, emerged wire-to-wire winner after an exceptional final round of nine-under 61, matching his tournament low from round one, which saw him end the week with an astounding total of 31-under 249.

The 28-year-old Sandhu, an international winner, picked up the winner's cheque of Rs 15, which took his season's earnings to Rs 73,67,200, giving him a substantial lead of over Rs 12 lakh in the PGTI Order of Merit.

As the preferred lie rule was in application through the week due to the rains preceding the event, Yuvraj's tournament total, the lowest ever on the PGTI, will not register as a PGTI record.

Yuvraj Sandhu stamped his authority at the Rs 1 crore Mysuru Open 2025 golf tournament on Friday *PHOTO: PTI*

Bangladesh's Jamal Hossain (62-65-64-66) came in second at a total of 23-under 257 following his effort of 66 in the final round. Delhi's Arjun Prasad (66-62-64-66) secured third place at 22-under 258 after shooting a last round of 66.

As a result, Arjun, one of the most consistent performers this season with eight top-10s to his credit, moved up from third to second place in the PGTI's money list with the season's earnings of Rs. 61,12,549. —*PTI*

AFC CHAMPIONS LEAGUE 2

FC Goa to face Ronaldo's Al-Nassr

KUALA LUMPUR, 15 AUG

As the draw for the AFC Champions League Two 2025-26 was unveiled at AFC House on Friday, FC Goa have found themselves in the same group as Cristiano Ronaldo's Al Nassr.

FC Goa, winners of the Kalinga Super Cup 2025, are placed in Group D with Al Nassr Club (Saudi Arabia), Al Zawra'a SC (Iraq), and FC Istiklol (Tajikistan).

The Gaurs sealed their spot in the AFC Champions League Two 2025-26 Group Stage after staving off a late fightback from Al Seeb Club of Oman to walk away with a 2-1 win in their Preliminary Stage tie.

FC Goa beat Al Seeb Club 2-1 to qualify for AFC Champions League Two *PHOTO: X/@FC GOA*

FC Goa's opponents, Al Nassr, are the third-placed team from the Saudi Pro League 2024-25, Al Zawra'a SC are the Iraq Stars League 2024-25 runners-up, and FC Istiklol are the Tajikistan Higher League 2024 champions.

On the other hand, the 2024-25 ISL Shield winners Mohun Bagan Super Giant are drawn in Group C alongside Sepahan SC (Iran), Al Hussein SC (Jordan), and Ahal FC (Turkmenistan).

This is Mohun Bagan SG's eighth appearance in Asia's second-tier men's club competition, which was rebranded from the AFC Cup to the AFC Champions League Two last season. FC Goa will play continental football for the second time, having represented India in the 2021 AFC Champions League. —*PTI*

ICC bans former SL first-class player Saman

DUBAI, 15 AUG

Former Sri Lankan domestic cricketer Saliya Saman has been banned from all cricket for five years after an ICC Anti-Corruption Tribunal found him guilty of breaching the Emirates Cricket Board (ECB) Anti-Corruption Code.

Saman was among eight people charged in September 2023 for breaching the Code.

The ban is backdated to 13 September 2023, when Saman was provisionally suspended, and hence, he has already served two years of his sentence.

The 39-year-old Saman played 101 first-class and 77 List A games.

Saliya Saman *PHOTO: SL*

The charges relate to the 2021 Abu Dhabi T10 Cricket League and attempts to corrupt matches in that tournament, which were disrupted by the ICC, the Designated Anti-Corruption Official (DACO) for the ECB's Code for the tournament.

Saman has been charged with three counts: 2.1.1, 2.1.3, and 2.1.4.

Article 2.1.1 states: "Being party to an attempt to fix, contrive, or influence improperly matches or aspects of matches in the Abu Dhabi T10 2021." —*PTI*